



## Religious Slaughter

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- This note describes the methods of slaughter used by the Jewish and Muslim religions. It also contains the recommendation of the Farm Animal Welfare Council Report to end the religious exemption for slaughter without pre-stunning. The Labour Government's response, in April 2004, rejected that recommendation.
  - EU law, like UK law before it, requires farm animals to be stunned before slaughter. However, there is an exception for religious slaughter.
  - The Jewish method of slaughter, Shechita, requires animals not to be stunned before slaughter. Islamic food rules, for Halal meat, can be satisfied with animals stunned before slaughter, but there is no definitive ruling and slaughter without pre-stunning does also take place. Most Halal meat in the UK comes from animals that were stunned before slaughter.
  - The Farm Animal Welfare Council has concluded that slaughter without pre-stunning does cause suffering to the animals.
  - Much of the meat on an animal killed by religious slaughter may not qualify as Kosher or Halal meat. There is no requirement that it should be labelled as meat from an animal killed without pre-stunning.
  - The European Parliament voted in June 2010 to require compulsory labelling for all meat from animals killed without pre-stunning. The Council of Ministers would have to approve that legislation. The Coalition Government does not support it.
  - The Coalition Government has no intention of making Halal or Shechita slaughter illegal, but it is considering welfare labelling of meat.

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## 1 Legislation

British legislation, now implementing EC legislation, requires the pre-stunning of animals before slaughter in normal circumstances, so that death should be painless. Religious slaughter, on the other hand, is a controversial issue, because the animals are not stunned. The requirement in British legislation for the pre-stunning of animals in slaughterhouses has always provided exemptions for the Jewish and Muslim methods of slaughter. The Jewish method of slaughter is called Shechita. Food fulfilling the requirements of Jewish law is called Kosher. The Muslim method is called Halal. The exemption dates back to the *Slaughter of Animals (Scotland) Act 1928* and the *Slaughter of Animals Act 1933* (which applied to England and Wales). Schedule 12 of *The Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995* (SI 731) lays down provisions for slaughter by a religious method, additional to EU law.<sup>1</sup>

EU law on slaughter is now contained in [Council Regulation \(EC\) No 1099/2009 of 24 September 2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing](#). Paragraph 18 of the preamble explains the position on religious slaughter:

Derogation from stunning in case of religious slaughter taking place in slaughterhouses was granted by Directive 93/119/EC. Since Community provisions applicable to religious slaughter have been transposed differently depending on national contexts and considering that national rules take into account dimensions that go beyond the purpose of this Regulation, it is important that derogation from stunning animals prior to slaughter should be maintained, leaving, however, a certain level of subsidiarity to each Member State. As a consequence, this Regulation respects the freedom of religion and the right to manifest religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance, as enshrined in Article 10 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si1995/Uksi\\_19950731\\_en\\_19.htm#sdiv12](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si1995/Uksi_19950731_en_19.htm#sdiv12)

## 2 The extent of religious slaughter

Complete statistics of religious slaughter are not kept, and the Government said in October 2010 that it did not know the number of Halal slaughterhouses.<sup>2</sup> The Meat Hygiene Service [MHS] Animal Welfare Review 2003 contained some information, although obviously the situation has changed considerably since then.<sup>3</sup> Those figures showed the vast majority of Halal meat coming from animals that were stunned before slaughter.

A PQ in 2011 produced some more recent figures, again suggesting that most Halal meat comes from animals that were stunned before slaughter:

More recent data collected by the EU Dialrel project see:

<http://www.dialrel.eu/images/factsheet-assesment-practices.pdf>

shows that, of the UK abattoirs surveyed, 100% of the animals and birds slaughtered for the production of kosher meat were slaughtered without prior stunning. For halal meat, 25% of cattle and 7% of sheep were slaughtered without prior stunning. The Dialrel data also indicates that no poultry were slaughtered for halal production without stunning.<sup>4</sup>

In both Denmark and New Zealand pre-stunning is a legal requirement for Halal slaughter, with the consent of the Muslim population.<sup>5</sup>

The New Zealand Islamic Meat Management Site explains:

### **NZIMM**

New Zealand Islamic Meat Management (NZIMM), brings together Halal the Shariah of Islam with the most modern developments in meat and food production. Managing Director Dr Haj Mohamed Abdel-AI is the pioneer of pre-slaughter stunning which is now the yardstick for Halal use around the world. This standard meets the highest levels of animal welfare, hygiene and efficiency. Multilevel auditing of Halal slaughtermen and processes ensures compliance. New Zealand food production comes with the highest Halal standards in the world. New Zealand Halal Processed Food Management is a subsidiary of NZIMM.

### **New Zealand Meat Processing Industry**

Certified New Zealand meat processing plants process 28.3 million lambs and sheep, 2.7 million cattle and 600,000 deer every year. Most of this is exported in frozen form, but an increasing volume is sent to other countries in chilled packs. (...)

Over the past few years stringent codes have obligated the processor to kill all livestock in a humane manner. It so happens that meat from relaxed animals tastes better and stores longer. Halal slaughter ideally advances the animal welfare requirement through the use of electric pre-slaughter head stunning.<sup>6</sup>

However, there is no single authoritative body that can definitively rule as to the Muslim law on this subject. Shechita slaughter, necessary for orthodox Jews, always requires that the animal is not pre-stunned.

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<sup>2</sup> HC Deb 19 October 2010 c632W

<sup>3</sup> Meat Hygiene Service, *Animal Welfare Review 2003*, pp13-4

<sup>4</sup> HC Deb 27 April 2011 c413W

<sup>5</sup> Report on the Welfare of Livestock when Slaughtered by Religious Methods, *Farm Animal Welfare Council* HMSO 1985, p.40

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.muslimleague.org.nz/modules/wfchannel/index.php?pagenum=4>

### 3 Halal meat served to everybody

Some private organisations and also state schools have started serving Halal meat to everybody, to avoid causing offence to Muslims. The *News of the World* has found this practice extensive:

Thousands of children are being served up controversial Halal meat in their school dinners—with no other choice than the veggie option. A *News of the World* investigation found that more than 200 schools use only meat from animals slaughtered to meet Muslim religious beliefs. (...)

However our survey found that Halal meat is being foisted on all kids in many schools. We found 212 cases of schools serving only Halal meat—in Tower Hamlets alone there were 103. (...)

Sports fans are also being served Halal meat without their knowledge. All beef, chicken and lamb at Wembley, Ascot and Twickenham is Halal .

Whitbread which owns Costa Coffee shops and Premier Inn hotels said 80 per cent of its chicken is Halal .

Top councils for Halal -only meat: Tower Hamlets 103; Waltham Forest 44; Westminster 20; Harrow 10; Herefordshire 9; Camden 6; Slough 5; Bolton 3; Surrey 2; Leeds 2; Wandsworth 2, Hertfordshire 2.<sup>7</sup>

The meat industry insists that most of this meat is pre-stunned:

Significant quantities of the meat sold in the UK on the open market are slaughtered under halal standards, it has emerged. Industry estimates suggest strong Muslim demand for chicken and lamb has resulted in about 40% of poultry and 25-30% of lamb consumed in the UK meeting halal specification.

But not all of this meat is being marked as being produced using halal slaughter methods. Animal welfare campaign groups are suggesting that consumers need to be made aware if they are eating halal meat through clear labelling. They claim that the practice is cruel because in some cases the animals are killed without stunning.

But representatives of the meat industry have pointed out that in the UK most animals are pre-stunned before the animal's throat is cut. Historic data published by the Meat Hygiene Service suggests that around 90% of UK halal slaughter involves pre-stunning.

Beef and Lamb New Zealand confirmed that while the majority of the beef and lamb imported to the UK is slaughtered using halal methods, it is all pre-stunned.<sup>8</sup>

The exemption for religious slaughter in Schedule 12 of *The Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995* (SI 731) 1995 makes clear that it relates to a method of slaughter for people of that religion, not for everybody:

Slaughter by a religious method

2. In this Schedule references to slaughter by a religious method are references to slaughter without the infliction of unnecessary suffering—

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<sup>7</sup> "WHAT THE HALAL? Parents' outrage as 200 schools serve 'cruelty' meat", *News of the World*, 19 September 2010

<sup>8</sup> "Meat industry defends Halal strategy", *Farmers Weekly*, 23 September 2010

(a) by the Jewish method for the food of Jews by a Jew who holds a licence in accordance with Schedule 1 (which relates to the licensing of slaughtermen) and who is duly licensed—

(i) in England and Wales by the Rabbinical Commission referred to in Part IV of this Schedule; or

(ii) in Scotland by the Chief Rabbi; or

(b) by the Muslim method for the food of Muslims by a Muslim who holds a licence in accordance with Schedule 1.

According to the *Scotsman*, in November 2010, Halal meat has been served in House of Commons canteens, without labelling:

'Halal meat has been served in the House of Commons without MPs and staff being told, it emerged last night. The Commons catering service used poultry slaughtered in accordance with Islamic law and customers were "not made aware", Sir Stuart Bell, representing the House of Commons Commission, said.'<sup>9</sup>

#### **4 Does Religious Slaughter cause particular suffering?**

The Farm Animal Welfare Council, in their Report of 1985, concluded that religious slaughter involves the animal in greater suffering than methods involving pre-stunning:

The up-to-date scientific evidence available and our own observations leave no doubt in our minds that religious methods of slaughter, even when carried out under ideal conditions, must result in a degree of pain, suffering and distress which does not occur in the properly stunned animal.<sup>10</sup>

More research to support this view was published by Craig Johnson in 2009 in New Zealand. The *New Scientist* reported:

Johnson's work, funded by the UK and New Zealand agriculture ministries, builds on findings in human volunteers of specific patterns of brain electrical activity when they feel pain. Recorded with electroencephalograms, the patterns were reproducible in at least eight other mammal species known to be experiencing pain. Johnson developed a way of lightly anaesthetising animals so that although they experienced no pain, the same electrical pain signals would be reliably detected, showing they would have suffered pain if awake.

The team first cut calves' throats in a procedure matching that of Jewish and Muslim slaughter methods. They detected a pain signal lasting for up to 2 minutes after the incision. When their throats are cut, calves generally lose consciousness after 10 to 30 seconds, sometime longer. The researchers then showed that the pain originates from cutting throat nerves, not from the loss of blood, suggesting the severed nerves send pain signals until the time of death. Finally, they stunned animals 5 seconds after incision and showed that this makes the pain signal disappear instantly.<sup>11</sup>

A PQ in March 2011 dealt with pain, showing the Government carefully avoiding expressing any opinion:

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<sup>9</sup> "Commons canteens served Halal chicken", *Scotsman*, 17 November 2010

<sup>10</sup> Farm Animal Welfare Council, *Report on the Welfare of Livestock when Slaughtered by Religious Methods*, HMSO 1985, para 92

<sup>11</sup> "Calves feel the pain of religious slaughter", *New Scientist*, 17 October 2009

**Mr Bain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent research her Department has (a) evaluated and (b) commissioned on levels of pain and distress experienced during the slaughter process by animals (i) not stunned and (ii) stunned prior to slaughter.

**Mr Paice:** DEFRA and the New Zealand Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry commissioned and joint funded research to investigate the effects of slaughter by ventral neck incision on the EEG in calves (project number MH0129). This work commenced in January 2005 and the final report was published in the New Zealand Veterinary Journal in April 2009. This work indicates that the neck cut associated with religious slaughter evokes a pain response in anaesthetised calves. (...)

DEFRA has not specifically evaluated any research on levels of pain and distress experienced during the slaughter process by animals stunned or not stunned prior to slaughter. However we do seek to ensure policy decisions reflect latest scientific evidence and will consider all relevant published research before final decisions are made. In addition the Farm Animal Welfare Council conducted a review of research when it prepared its reports on red and white meat slaughter in 2003 and 2009 respectively.<sup>12</sup>

## 5 Labelling

Another important issue relates to labelling. Much of the meat from animals slaughtered by religious methods is not sold as such, because it comes from the wrong cut of meat. The Farm Animal Welfare Council in its 1985 report estimated that no more than an estimated third of the weight of all animals slaughtered according to Jewish methods finds its way into Kosher shops and a high proportion of Shechita meat is therefore distributed to the open market.<sup>13</sup> Many people believe that if such meat had to be labelled as coming from animals slaughtered without pre-stunning, they would not buy it. That might undermine the economics of Kosher meat.<sup>14</sup> Proposals for such labelling requirements have tentatively appeared in EC documents, but have always been fiercely resisted.

The Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) flagged up the issue in 2003, but without any recommendation to tighten up labelling rules.

183. During our consultations concern was expressed to us about meat from animals slaughtered without pre-stunning (including meat from the hindquarters of some animals and meat from rejected animals) being placed, unidentified, on the open market rather than being consumed by the Jewish community. As a result, larger numbers of animals are slaughtered without pre-stunning than would be necessary if all carcasses, and the entire carcase were acceptable. FAWC will return to the consumer choice implications of this in a future report.<sup>15</sup>

In its response in April 2004, the Labour Government announced consultation on a voluntary labelling scheme. A PQ in April 2007 showed no real progress on labelling.<sup>16</sup>

The labelling issue was raised again in November 2009 in a report in the European Parliament by MEP Renate Sommer, of the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

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<sup>12</sup> HC Deb 15 March 2011 c202W

<sup>13</sup> Farm Animal Welfare Council, *Report on the Welfare of Livestock when Slaughtered by Religious Methods*, HMSO 1985, para 27

<sup>14</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 3 May 1991

<sup>15</sup> Farm Animal Welfare Council, *Welfare of Farmed Animals at Slaughter or Killing Part 1 Red Meat Animals*, June 2003

<sup>16</sup> HC Deb 23 April 2007 c906W

Committee. She covered nutritional and origin labelling, but also proposed the category “Meat from slaughter without stunning”.<sup>17</sup> The stunning category was approved by the European Parliament on 16 June 2010.<sup>18</sup> In order to go forward it will require approval by the European Commission and the Council of Ministers. A PQ in November 2010 explained that the Coalition Government did not support the amendment:

#### **Ritual Slaughter: EU Action**

**Mr Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make it her policy to oppose the provision contained in amendment 205 of the European Parliament proposal to require label information on the kosher slaughter method; and if she will make a statement.

**Mr Paice:** Generally we believe people should know what they are buying in shops or when they are eating out and we are discussing with the food industry whether labelling and point of sale information can play a greater role in giving consumers an informed choice about the food they buy. This may include information about the method of slaughter. However, we do not consider amendment 205 of the food information regulation the correct way to address this. Instead, we would wish to see this considered in the wider context of animal welfare and method of slaughter labelling.<sup>19</sup>

A PQ in February 2011 explained the position on the proposal:

**Mr Paice** [holding answer 17 February 2011]: The European Parliament proposal that meat from animals slaughtered without stunning should be labelled was made during the Parliament's First Reading consideration of the Commission proposal for a Food Information Regulation. In December, the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council met to reach a political agreement on the Food Information Regulations but member states did not discuss the European Parliament's proposed amendment on method of slaughter labelling. As a result this proposal is not included in the common position that will be submitted to the European Parliament shortly.

The European Parliament will undertake its Second Reading on the Food Information Regulation in the coming months in its Environment Committee and then in Plenary. If the amendment on welfare labelling is retained by the European Parliament in its Second Reading, the proposal will then go to Council for consideration.<sup>20</sup>

There was an update in June 2011:

T6. [62900] Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Given that the Government are in favour of animals being stunned before slaughter, when might we have some food labelling regulations that will mark kosher and halal products as such, so that those of us who object to ritual slaughter do not buy them inadvertently?

Mr Paice: My hon. Friend rightly says that the Government believe that all animals should be stunned before slaughter, but we respect the rights of religious groups. However, this practice should clearly be restricted, wherever possible, to food for those religious groups. We face serious challenges in labelling and ensuring efficient systems of traceability. The Government are examining the matter and, as I am sure he is aware, it is being discussed in respect of the food information regulations in

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<sup>17</sup> “Sommer calls for nano labels and introduces warning on GDAs”, *Agra Europe*, 27 November 2009

<sup>18</sup> European Parliament Press Release, [MEPs set out clearer and more consistent food labelling rules](#), 16 June 2010

<sup>19</sup> HC Deb 30 November 2010 c697W

<sup>20</sup> HC Deb 28 February 2011 c62W

Brussels, although he will perhaps not wish to take that option further, given his views on that place. I can also tell him that we will shortly consult on the introduction of the new welfare at slaughter regulations and we will be raise this whole matter then.<sup>21</sup>

A letter to the *Independent* by Henry Grunwald QC, Chairman Shechita UK, criticised the proposals in the November 2009 report:

The Jewish community is fully supportive of providing consumers with information about the origins of their food and we urged MEPs that if they wanted to label meat and meat products, labels should include those killed by electrocution, shooting, gassing or clubbing as well as the many millions of animals that are mis-stunned during the stunning process. But to single out one method is suspicious, troubling and discriminatory.

It is a popular myth that shechita is a painful method of slaughter. There is ample scientific evidence to the contrary. (...) And shechita accounts for only 0.03% of all animals slaughtered each year for food in the UK. The real concern for animal welfare activists should be the far greater numbers of animals mis-stunned by captive-bolt or electricity every year. Both Defra and Compassion for World Farming recognise that 9% of animals are mis-stunned.<sup>22</sup>

## 6 The RSPCA position

The RSPCA view comes in para 7.10 of *RSPCA Policies on Animal Welfare* (Revised 2006):

The RSPCA is opposed to the slaughter of any food animal without rendering that animal insensible to pain and distress until death supervenes.

It notes that *The Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995* state that all animals slaughtered in a slaughterhouse or knacker's yard must either be instantaneously slaughtered by means of a mechanically operated instrument or stunned, and continues:

The 1995 Regulations exempt the Jewish method of slaughter, shechita, and the Muslim method of slaughter halal. While respecting individual religious practices, the Society opposes these exemptions on welfare grounds. All meat from animals killed in this way should be clearly labelled.

An earlier booklet describes their position:

The RSPCA recognises that in any democratic country it is a fundamental right of religious groups to practice their beliefs without hindrance, but where these beliefs are directly responsible for animal suffering, that right has to be challenged. Surely it is not unreasonable to suggest that, in the light of new scientific knowledge and society's more caring attitudes to animals, religious traditions might be changed to secure an animal's welfare before and during slaughter.<sup>23</sup>

## 7 The Farm Animal Welfare Council Reports

The Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) 2003 Report on welfare at slaughter recommended an end to the exemption by which some animals are slaughtered without stunning. In the meantime, it recommended improvements in practice:

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<sup>21</sup> HC Deb 30 June 2011 c1097

<sup>22</sup> Letter to the *Independent*, 30 June 2010

### **Slaughter without pre-stunning**

189. Government should arrange re-evaluation of all restraining pens currently in use, particularly in terms of the efficiency of restraint of animals of various sizes.

192. The legislation prohibiting the lifting of sheep by the fleece should be enforced by the OVS [Official Veterinary Surgeons].

193. Alternatives to manual restraint methods for sheep should be explored by the industry for use at slaughter without pre-stunning.

197. Where an animal has not been stunned, the OVS must ensure that nothing is inserted into the neck wound post-cut.

201. Council considers that slaughter without pre-stunning is unacceptable and that the Government should repeal the current exemption.

203. Until the current exemption which permits slaughter without pre-stunning is repealed, Council recommends that any animal not stunned before slaughter should receive an immediate post-cut stun.<sup>24</sup>

In May 2009 FAWC published a report on welfare at slaughter of white meat animals, like chickens. Again it criticised slaughter without stunning, noting that a bird retains consciousness for around 20 seconds after the neck cut is made:

207. FAWC is concerned about the pain and distress experienced by conscious birds, in particular that likely to be generated by a neck cut and, where practised, subsequent manipulation of the wound. Following consideration of the available evidence, FAWC is in agreement with the prevailing international scientific consensus that slaughter without pre-stunning causes pain and distress. On the basis that this is avoidable and in the interests of welfare, FAWC concludes that all birds should be pre-stunned before slaughter.

208. FAWC is mindful that for certain sections of British society, the method of slaughter of animals for food is part of religious faith and an associated way of life. We welcome the EU-sponsored project on religious slaughter aimed at improving knowledge and expertise through dialogue and debate on the welfare, legislative and socio-economic aspects (<http://www.dialrel.eu>). We also recognise the difficulties of reconciling scientific findings with matters of faith. We urge Government to continue to engage with the religious communities to enable progress to be made.

#### Recommendations

209. Slaughter of poultry without pre-stunning causes significant avoidable pain and distress. Government should engage with the appropriate communities to ensure that avoidable pain and distress is prevented.

210. Where poultry are not insensible to pain or distress during slaughter, manipulation of wound surfaces of the neck should not take place.<sup>25</sup>

## **8 The Labour Government's Response to the 2003 FAWC Report**

The Labour Government in April 2004 announced that it would be consulting on its draft response to the 2003 FAWC report. It rejected the idea of a ban on the production of kosher or halal meat. It saw merit in FAWC's idea of stunning cattle immediately after being cut, because they take time to lose consciousness. However, it would not make that mandatory.

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<sup>23</sup> RSPCA Farm Animal Welfare Booklet (1995)

<sup>24</sup> Farm Animal Welfare Council, [Welfare of Farmed Animals at Slaughter or Killing Part 1 Red Meat Animals](#), June 2003

<sup>25</sup> FAWC, [Report on the Welfare of Farmed Animals at Slaughter or Killing Part 2: White Meat Animals](#), May 2009

The Labour Government also suggested a voluntary scheme to label meat resulting from slaughter without pre-stunning. Many other FAWC recommendations – in relation to slaughter but not religious slaughter - were accepted:

Animal Welfare Minister Ben Bradshaw said that the FAWC recommendation that the Government should ban religious slaughter without stunning on welfare grounds had understandably been deeply contentious for the Jewish and Muslim communities across the UK, to whom this is a matter of fundamental concern. Mr Bradshaw said: "We are grateful to FAWC for their work, seeking to improve the welfare of farm animals - a goal we share. We also accept that there are deeply held beliefs on both sides of aspects of this argument. We will not ban the production of halal or kosher meat. A ban could in any case simply result in kosher and halal meat being imported. We would, therefore, be exporting the problem, resulting in no overall improvement in animal welfare".

While the Government is proposing to reject the FAWC recommendation to ban slaughter without prior stunning, Mr Bradshaw said proposals for a post-cut stun for cattle should receive further consideration while accepting at the same time the depth of feeling and deeply held beliefs of some religious groups.

"The Government sees some merit in the FAWC recommendation that cattle slaughtered by having their throats cut should receive an immediate post-cut stun because of the time it takes cattle to lose consciousness, but we do not intend to pursue a mandatory system for this and intend to explore whether progress can be made on a voluntary basis. We would welcome the views of the communities concerned."

Mr Bradshaw also suggested that the consultation provides an opportunity to start a debate on whether meat from animals slaughtered without prior stunning for the kosher and halal markets should be labelled voluntarily. This however is a matter for the Food Standards Agency.

The issues associated with labelling centre around the fact that some of the meat from animals slaughtered by the religious slaughter method, where the animal has not been stunned, finds its way on to the ordinary meat market. At present, it is not required to be labelled as having come from an animal that was slaughtered without prior stunning.<sup>26</sup>

On 8 March 2005, the Labour Government produced a fuller response to the FAWC Report:

**Recommendation 197: Where an animal has not been stunned, the OVS must ensure that nothing is inserted into the neck wound post-cut.**

Response: Do not accept. The Government is committed to respect for the rights of religious groups, and in view of the assertion by Shechita UK that the insertion of the slaughterman's hand into the wound to check that all the vital structures have been cut cleanly is an essential part of shechita slaughter, we will not be legislating against it. We accept that such action will stimulate nociceptive pathways and in a conscious animal may lead to a perception of pain. However the length of time for an animal to lose consciousness after the neck cut is disputed. We will continue to explore with the religious authorities whether, following the cut, there could be a greater delay before this inspection is carried out.

**Recommendation 201: Council considers that slaughter without pre-stunning is unacceptable and that the Government should repeal the current exemption.**

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<sup>26</sup> Defra Press Release 127/04, *Government response to the Farm Animal Welfare Council Report on the welfare of farmed animals at slaughter or killing: part 1 red meat animals*, 1 April 2004

Response: Do not accept. The Government does not intend to ban the slaughter of animals without prior stunning by religious groups. We agree with FAWC that the scientific evidence indicates that animals that receive an effective pre-cut stun do not experience pain at the time of slaughter. The balance of current scientific evidence also suggests that those cattle which receive an immediate post-cut stun are likely to suffer less than those that do not. However we recognise that this latter conclusion is disputed. The Government is committed to respect for the rights of religious groups and accepts that an insistence on a pre-cut or immediate post-cut stun would not be compatible with the requirements of religious slaughter by Jewish and Muslim groups. However, others, particularly consumer and welfare groups, oppose slaughter without prior stunning and do not wish to eat meat that has not been stunned prior to slaughter. Meat from these animals can find its way onto the ordinary meat market but is not identifiable by consumers at the point of sale. As part of the wider process of review and consultation on labelling meat, the Government will work with consumer and industry groups to consider whether this problem can be addressed through a voluntary system of labelling, bearing in mind that an early EU agreement on meat labelling according to slaughter method is unlikely.

**Recommendation 203: Until the current exemption which permits slaughter without pre-stunning is repealed, Council recommends that any animal not stunned before slaughter should receive an immediate post-cut stun.**

Response: Partially accept. The Government does not intend to make it a compulsory requirement for animals to receive an immediate post-cut stun. The Government considers that the current balance of scientific evidence suggests that cattle which have not received a pre-cut stun would benefit from an immediate post-cut stun. However, we recognise that this conclusion is disputed. The Government is committed to respect for the rights of religious groups and accepts that a compulsory immediate post-cut stun on cattle would not be compatible with the requirements of religious slaughter by Jewish and Muslim groups. We will continue to discuss with the religious authorities the extent to which a voluntary immediate post-cut stun might be introduced in a manner that is compatible with their beliefs.<sup>27</sup>

## 9 The Coalition Government will not ban Halal or Kosher killing

In November 2010, the Government position was summarised by Lord Henley:

I can say that we have no plans whatever to make the practice of halal or kosher killing illegal. However, we think it worth considering the appropriate labelling of all meat so that people know exactly what it is that they are eating and how the meat has been killed.<sup>28</sup>

A PQ in 2011 also covered Government policy:

**Mr Bain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her policy is on requiring the stunning of animals prior to slaughter.

**Mr Paice:** We would prefer to see all animals stunned before slaughter. However, religious slaughter (slaughter without prior stunning) is currently allowed in the UK in recognition of the religious beliefs of Muslim and Jewish faiths. This is consistent with the European directive 93/119/EC which permits an exemption from the requirement to stun animals for methods of slaughter required by certain religious rites.

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<sup>27</sup> Defra response to FAWC recommendations, March 2005

<sup>28</sup> HL Deb 23 November 2010 c1006

In the UK slaughter without prior stunning can only be undertaken in a slaughterhouse. Schedule 12 of the Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995 sets out the requirements in more detail, including conditions for restraint, handling, slaughter and minimum bleed-out times.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> HC Deb 15 March 2011 c202W