

ABOUT HUMANISTS UK

At Humanists UK, we want a tolerant world where rational thinking and kindness prevail. We work to support lasting change for a better society, championing ideas for the one life we have. Our work helps people be happier and more fulfilled, and by bringing non-religious people together we help them develop their own views and an understanding of the world around them. Founded in 1896, we are trusted to promote humanism by over 85,000 members and supporters and over 100 members of the All Party Parliamentary Humanist Group. Through our ceremonies, pastoral support, education services, and campaigning work, we advance free thinking and freedom of choice so everyone can live in a fair and equal society.

Humanists believe that animals are sentient beings, capable of experiencing pain and pleasure. Thus, we have a moral duty to treat them with compassion and, as far as possible, to eliminate unnecessary pain and suffering which they experience as a result of human behaviour. We have long campaigned for an end to the exemption from the law mandating pre-stunning for animals slaughtered to provide shechita and halal meat. However, if the exemption is not to be brought to an end, then we think at the very least rules should be introduced requiring all non-stunned meat to be labeled as such.

RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

Confidentiality

1. Would you like your response to be confidential?

No

Introduction

2. What is your name?

Rachel Taggart-Ryan

3. What is your email address?

rachel@humanism.org.uk

4. What is your organisation?

Humanists UK

5. Are you a?

Non-Governmental Organisation - In an official capacity as the representative of a business/business association/other organisation.

Introduction

15. What areas does your organisation primarily operate within?

- The advancement of human rights, conflict resolution or reconciliation or the promotion of religious or racial harmony or equality and diversity
- Advancement of animal welfare

16. Where does your organisation operate?

North East, North West, West Midlands, East Midlands, South West, South East, Yorkshire and the Humber, East of England, Greater London, Northern Ireland, and Wales.

Our views

18. Our idea for the national food strategy is based upon the following principles:

- help citizens make informed decisions about the food they eat



- promote the highest standards of animal health and welfare

19. Idea for a National Food Strategy

A National Food Strategy should place protecting and improving our animal welfare regime at the heart of its considerations of animal agriculture, including the welfare of animals at the time of slaughter. We support the following three policy changes:

1. All animals should be stunned prior to slaughter to reduce suffering without exception.
2. Failing point 1, any use of the legal exemption should be minimised and carried out strictly in accordance with the law, which allows the exemption only to provide meat for Jews and Muslims,
3. Failing point 1, non-stunned meat should be labelled as such so that consumers are made aware at the point of purchase whether their meat has been stunned or not.

There is a significant body of scientific evidence that has found that pre-stunning of animals prior to slaughter can alleviate pain and this method is recommended by all the major animal welfare and veterinary bodies in the UK, including the Government's own Farm Animal Welfare Committee (FAWC), the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA), the British Veterinary Association (BVA), the Humane Slaughter Association, and the European Food Safety Authority. The FAWC says that cutting the throat of an animal without stunning causes 'such a massive injury [that it] would result in very significant pain and distress in the period before insensibility supervenes' and as a result advocates compulsory pre-stunning and that Government should repeal the exemption.¹

While we fully respect the right of religious communities to practise their beliefs, such practices can and should be legitimately limited if they damage the health and morals of our society or infringe upon the rights and freedoms of others. We believe that slitting the throat of a fully conscious animal and allowing it to die slowly of blood loss is a dereliction of our moral duty towards it and is of sufficient importance to justify a limitation of freedom of religious practice. Therefore we call for the exceptions to the Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing Regulations to be removed. This would bring the UK's policy in line with a number of other countries which have repealed such exemptions in recent years, including Australia, Denmark, Switzerland, Sweden, Iceland, and New Zealand.

Until the exemption allowing animals to be slaughtered without pre-stunning is ended, it is our view that rules should be introduced requiring all such meat to be labelled so that consumers can make informed choices about the products they purchase, in line with their belief systems.

There is substantial evidence that the meat industry is currently failing to protect consumers in this regard, with non-stunned halal and shechita meat being sold widely and unknowingly to non-Muslims and non-Jews. The RSPCA estimated in 2018 that less than half of meat from animals slaughtered by Jewish methods is sold in kosher shops² and the Food

¹ House of Commons Library: *Religious Slaughter of Animals*, p. 15.

<http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN07108/SN07108.pdf>

² RSPCA 'Slaughter without pre-stunning (sometimes referred to as religious slaughter)' January 2018. <https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.rspca.org.uk/documents/1494939/7712578/Slaughter%2Bwithout%2Bpre-stunning%2Binformation%2Bsheet%2B%2528PDF%2B236KB%2529.pdf/5a1a848a-51dd-dd>



Standards Agency (FSA) believes that non-stunned sheep meat now represents 25 percent of the entire market in the UK,³ way in excess of the number of Muslims or Jews, who currently comprise only five and 0.5 percent of the population respectively.⁴ This widespread practice is possibly unlawful, given that religious exemptions are limited to meat intended to be consumed by Muslims and Jews only. According to Lord Trees, member of the All Party Parliamentary Humanist Group and a former president of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, many non-Muslim Britons are inadvertently eating non-stunned meat from animals slaughtered without pre-stunning. He said that the present system lacks 'accurate traceability' which makes it extremely likely that non-stunned meat is entering the general food market, particularly in pies and processed ready meals.⁵ We find this deeply concerning and believe that consumers ought to be able to make informed decisions about the products they buy in supermarkets, restaurants, and are provided with in schools, hospitals, and prisons.

There have been calls within Parliament to introduce labelling for meat products indicating the method of slaughter for a number of years. An amendment (NC31) proposed to the Agriculture Bill 2019, which has now fallen, to introduce mandatory method of slaughter labelling, enjoyed broad cross-party support.⁶

The FAWC acknowledged as far back as 1985 that there is genuine public concern about meat from animals slaughtered without pre-stunning being sold to consumers who have no religious requirement for their meat to be prepared in this way. It recommended that all meat from animals slaughtered by religious methods, and offered for sale '...should be clearly labelled to indicate the method of slaughter.'⁷ Further, in a recent Westminster Hall debate, the former Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs David Rutley MP confirmed that 'The Government believes that consumers should have the necessary information available to them to make an informed choice about their food, and

[6c-ada5-76971d04475c?version%3D2.0%26t%3D1559143358316%26download%3Dtrue&sa=D&ust=1571746932293000&usq=AFQjCNHVDh2kaIQ8cPXwAGF4XOGXeEduq](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/778588/slaughter-method-survey-2018.pdf)

³ DEFRA, *Results of the 2018 FSA Survey into Slaughter Methods in England and Wales February 2019*
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/778588/slaughter-method-survey-2018.pdf

⁴ Office of National Statistics, *Muslim population in the UK*.
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/aboutus/transparencyandgovernance/freedomofinformationfoi/muslimpopulationintheuk/>

⁵ Mark Chandler, 'Unsuspecting Britons "eating halal and kosher meat" in READY MEALS without knowing', *The Express*, 16 February 2018
<https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/919929/Halal-kosher-meat-ready-meals-Royal-College-of-Veterinary-Surgeons-Lord-Trees>

⁶ House of Commons, *Agriculture Bill 2019 Notices of amendments given up to and including Thursday 26 September 2019*
https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/2017-2019/0292/amend/agriculture_rm_rep_0926.pdf

⁷ RSPCA 'Slaughter without pre-stunning (sometimes referred to as religious slaughter)' January 2018.
<https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.rspca.org.uk/documents/1494939/7712578/Slaughter%2Bwith%2Bpre-stunning%2Binformation%2Bsheet%2B%2528PDF%2B236KB%2529.pdf/5a1a848a-51dd-dd6c-ada5-76971d04475c?version%3D2.0%26t%3D1559143358316%26download%3Dtrue&sa=D&ust=1571746932293000&usq=AFQjCNHVDh2kaIQ8cPXwAGF4XOGXeEduq>



the issue of revised labelling [relating to non-stunned meat] is something that the Government are considering in the context of the UK's exit from the EU'.⁸

We therefore call upon the Government to introduce the following policies:

1. All animals should be stunned prior to slaughter to reduce suffering without exception.
2. Failing point 1, any use of the legal exemption should be minimised and carried out strictly in accordance with the law, which allows the exemption only to provide meat for Jews and Muslims,
3. Failing point 1, non-stunned meat should be labelled as such so that consumers are made aware at the point of purchase whether their meat has been stunned or not.

For more details, information and evidence, contact Humanists UK:

Rachel Taggart-Ryan
Campaigns Office
07951 176 245
020 7324 3065
rachel@humanists.uk
humanists.uk

⁸ House of Commons Deb 03 April 2019 Non-stun Slaughter of Animals Vol 657, WH.
<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2019-04-03/debates/A6B3FD52-7243-4573-9580-48CD6C9A110A/Non-StunSlaughterOfAnimals>

