

### **Animal welfare and religious slaughter**

Current law in New Zealand requires that all animals are stunned prior to slaughter unless the slaughter method is for religious purposes. Under the new Animal Welfare Act of 1999, new codes of welfare for the commercial slaughter of animals are now being drafted by the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC). This Committee has published a discussion document for public consultation on the matter of minimum welfare standards that should apply to religious slaughter.

The Jewish and Muslim faiths both have rules about methods of slaughter. The Jewish method, 'shechita', involves killing by severing the blood vessels of the neck with a quick, clean and deep cut. Animals slaughtered in accordance with Muslim law are termed 'halal'. These are also killed with a neck cut. At present, there are voluntary agreements in place in New Zealand covering both these methods of religious slaughter. Halal animals are rendered unconscious by a head-only electrical stun prior to slaughter — a method which meets both Muslim requirements and the animal welfare concerns of New Zealand's trading partners. New Zealand is the largest exporter of halal sheep meat in the world and also has a large halal beef export trade.

Slaughter by the shechita method is restricted to only a few slaughterhouses and occurs only 2–3 times a year. Chickens, cattle and lambs are slaughtered in this way for the Jewish community in New Zealand — there is no export trade. None of these animals are pre-stunned, but, under the voluntary agreement with MAF, cattle are stunned within 10 s following the neck cut. Chickens and lambs are not stunned after cutting.

NAWAC will be considering whether slaughter carried out in accordance with historically prescribed religious laws and doctrines causes "unreasonable or unnecessary pain or distress". The Committee's position regarding animals that have not been pre-stunned is: "... that in all cases (sheep, goats, cattle, poultry), the level and duration of pain experienced, during the physical cut to the neck and during the subsequent period until insensibility occurs, is unreasonable".

The Committee will also be considering the balance of every person's right under the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 to "... manifest that person's religion or belief in worship, observance, practice, or teaching ... against the value society places on protecting animals from unreasonable or unnecessary pain or distress". These are important issues in many other countries also and the conclusions reached in New Zealand are likely to have influence around the world.

This document provides a good overview of the issues of religious slaughter and includes concise accounts of the methods and their welfare implications.

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*Discussion paper on the animal welfare standards to apply when animals are slaughtered in accordance with religious requirements* April 2001. NAWAC Discussion Paper. Published by the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee. 25 pp A4. ISBN 0-478-20086-2. Available from NAWAC Secretary, National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee, c/o Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, PO Box 2526, Wellington, New Zealand. Also at: <http://www.maf.govt.nz/AnimalWelfare>.

### **Welfare of livestock under foot and mouth movement restrictions**

It is noteworthy that, in little more than two weeks from the announcement of the first case of the UK foot and mouth epidemic which began in February 2001, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Foods produced and circulated a set of guidance note booklets on protecting