Overview report
Animal welfare at slaughter in Member States
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OVERVIEW REPORT OF FVO AUDITS
TO EVALUATE THE OFFICIAL CONTROLS OF ANIMAL WELFARE AT SLAUGHTER, CARRIED OUT IN MEMBER STATES IN 2013-2015
Executive Summary

This overview report is on a series of 13 audits by the Food and Veterinary Office on the official controls and other measures taken by Competent Authorities to implement Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 (hereafter "the Regulation").

The objective of the audits was to evaluate the effectiveness of official controls on business operators to ensure animals are spared any avoidable pain, distress, or suffering during their killing and related operations as required by the Regulation.

The overview report concludes that changes made by food business operators in response to their new responsibilities have been more successful in improving animal welfare where guides to good practice were available and where official controls were adapted to focus on operator's procedures and records.

Official controls have an active role in improving the compliance of food business operator's procedures and activities as evidenced by the fact that gaps found in operator's procedures occurred mostly where an audit approach had not been adopted as part of official controls.

As observed for waterbath stunning of poultry, official controls based on assessment of specific risk factors linked to animal welfare and good reporting systems allow competent authorities to target their controls better and to improve operator's compliance in a difficult area. The availability of guides to good practice in the specific sector also plays an important role in achieving compliance.

There are wide variations in the way Member States have operated the derogation for slaughter without stunning, as the Regulation allows flexibility for Member States to decide the level of the Competent Authority which grants the derogation and how such operations are subsequently administered.

The correlation between the FVO desk study and audits indicates that authorities with better documented control procedures (i.e. The Netherlands and Poland) had a better level of preparedness which translated into better compliance by food business operators.

The report makes recommendations to all Member States as a result of the lessons learned from the most common and significant non-compliances seen and makes suggestions which could help implement best practices for controls of Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing and thus improve the welfare of animals.
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Ampere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AWO</td>
<td>Animal welfare officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>BO</td>
<td>Business operator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>Competent Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCA</td>
<td>Central Competent Authority</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>FVO</td>
<td>Food and Veterinary Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>OV</td>
<td>Official veterinarian</td>
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<tr>
<td>OFES</td>
<td>On Farm Emergency Slaughter animals</td>
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<tr>
<td>MANCP</td>
<td>Multi Annual National Control Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOP</td>
<td>Standard operating procedure</td>
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1 INTRODUCTION

The European Union's Treaty of Lisbon, in force since 2009, recognised animals as sentient beings. Within the actions to ensure that animals do not endure avoidable pain or suffering, on 1st January 2013, Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing (hereafter "the Regulation"), came into effect, replacing Directive 93/119/EC.

This overview report is on a series of 13 audits by the Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) on the official controls and other measures taken by Competent Authorities (CAs) to implement the Regulation. Where weaknesses in the control systems were identified, the FVO made recommendations to the authorities in the individual audit reports. These recommendations are followed up by the Commission services. The individual audit reports are available on the Internet1. See Annex 2 to this report for further references.

2 BACKGROUND

The Regulation is based on scientific evidence and it gives greater responsibility of ensuring animal welfare to business operators, in a similar way that food safety legislation made food business operators (FBOs) more responsible for implementation of food safety in slaughterhouses ten years ago. It sets welfare requirements while giving flexibility on how these should be achieved.

For instance, food business operators have to:

- Draw up standard operating procedures (SOPs) with clear objectives, responsible persons, modus operandi, measurable criteria, as well as monitoring and recording procedures at all stages of processing where there are live animals;
- Designate an animal welfare officer for each slaughterhouse to assist them in ensuring compliance with the rules2, and
- Ensure staff competency in handling and killing animals.

On the other hand, authorities are responsible to:

- Ensure food business operators have made the above arrangements and that these arrangements are suitable and effective;
- Encourage organisations of business operators to develop guides to good practice,

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1 http://ec.europa.eu/food/fvo/audit_reports/index.cfm

2 The Commission services published a brochure “The animal welfare officer in the EU” to clarify the tasks of this position see:
• Ensure that manufacturers and/or retailers of restraining and stunning equipment provide operating and maintenance instructions with all equipment sold;

• Ensure availability of approved training courses leading to Certificates of Competence for slaughterhouse staff;

The Regulation covers also aspects of slaughter outside slaughterhouses, farmed game, and religious slaughter.

Prior to the Regulation entering into force, the FVO carried out missions to nine non-EU countries which export meat to the EU. The overview report from these missions concluded that much development work had already been done by both the industries and the competent authorities in countries exporting meat to the EU, and that these countries were well on their way to satisfying the requirements of the Regulation. The main animal welfare problem at this time was waterbath stunning of poultry. Subsequent FVO audits of these countries which evaluated equivalence with EU requirements in both the poultry and red meat exporting sectors. These audits included aspects of animal welfare and reported progress with issues such as waterbath stunning of poultry.

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has published four scientific opinions on the welfare of cattle, pigs, sheep and goats, and poultry during the slaughter process. The opinions propose monitoring indicators and sampling protocols to use in slaughterhouses. EFSA have also published guidance on criteria to evaluate studies on the effectiveness of stunning methods.

The Better Training for Safer Food (BTSF) programme launched a project to develop basic knowledge level e-learning modules. One of the 10 modules developed was on animal welfare at slaughter and killing for disease control. This module has already attracted over 1000 participants.

Before starting the series of audits, the FVO sent a questionnaire to all Member States regarding guides to good practice and official controls implementing the Regulation. A subsequent FVO desk study of the documented official control procedures concluded that

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4 See report of an audit carried out in Thailand to evaluate the control systems in place governing the production of poultry meat and poultry meat products intended for export to the EU DG(SANCO) 2013-6727 http://ec.europa.eu/food/fvo/audit_reports/details.cfm?rep_id=3088


6 http://www.btsf-elearning-campus.eu/moodle/

7 The report (DG(SANCO) 2013-7124) “desk study on documented procedures for official controls and guides to good practice on council regulation (ec) no 1099/2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing is available at: http://ec.europa.eu/food/fvo/overview_reports/details.cfm?rep_id=60
the procedures for controls in The Netherlands and Poland represented the best practice and provided good models to follow.

The following countries notified the Commission that they had validated guides to good practice:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Member State</strong></th>
<th><strong>Subject</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>All species</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>Cattle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pigs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Cattle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pigs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poultry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>Cattle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Cattle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pigs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>All species</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>Standard Operating Procedures</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The thirteen Member States selected for the audit series carried out between 2013 and 2015 account for more than 80% of the total EU annual production of both poultry and cattle. The FVO audits also included the monitoring of broilers at slaughterhouses as an indicator of welfare conditions on farm and the killing of animals outside slaughterhouses and transport of unfit animals, particularly cattle, to slaughterhouses. These topics are not included in this report and they will be covered in two further overview reports.

3 **Objectives**

The objective of the audits was to evaluate the effectiveness of official controls on business operators to ensure animals are spared any avoidable pain, distress, or suffering during their killing and related operations, in particular:

- The assurances given by official controls regarding the business operators’ compliance with applicable requirements of the Regulation and the business operators’ level of compliance
- Whether official controls on animal welfare at the time of killing are suitable to
ensure the effective implementation of the Regulation; and

- The Member State’s and Competent Authorities’ compliance with specific requirements of the Regulation, such as guides to good practice, scientific support and certificates of competence and the effectiveness of the implementation of these requirements.

Furthermore the audit sought to identify good practices recognised by the Competent Authorities in relation to the Regulation.

4 FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1 OFFICIAL CONTROLS ON BUSINESS OPERATOR'S OBLIGATIONS

All multi-annual national control plans prepared by Member States included risk categorisation for slaughterhouses, but most did not identify specific risks that could influence animal welfare.

In Member States that used only general risks for planning official controls (e.g. results of previous checks, complaints received, the structural and hygienic status of the slaughterhouses, past violations, the reliability of the operator), local authorities made little progress in improving difficult issues for animal welfare such as waterbath stunning of poultry. Member States which targeted their controls on specific slaughter processes achieved good compliance levels on problematic issues.

- Electrical waterbath stunning of poultry: The Netherlands and Hungary targeted inspections on this issue and they achieved compliance regarding the use of required electrical parameters. Poland also achieved compliance on this point by the early actions of the competent authority and effective official controls at local and regional levels. Many other Member States struggled and did not achieve compliance, citing problems with meat quality when the required electrical parameters were applied.

- A survey to identify risks by a competent authority in Germany identified slaughterhouses killing more than 1000 pigs/week as their greatest risk of non-compliance. The authority subsequently targeted this group of slaughterhouses for an inspection by a technician from the regional level. These joint inspections with the OV were additional to those carried out by the OVs independently and resulted in better compliance.

A significant shortcoming in official controls was the absence of a shift from "traditional" inspection to auditing the procedures implemented by food business operators. Belgium and Poland had made a clear shift with their official controls into a combination of inspections and audits of operators' own checks. This was more effective in detecting and addressing gaps in the business operator's own checks than Member States that did not fully include the audit of the operator's controls.

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8 The 13 countries audited account for 87% of poultry slaughtered in the EU and included the top five Member States (France, United Kingdom, Germany, Spain and Poland). From the top five only Germany and Poland did not have a compliance problem.
A small number of Member States had good practices regarding approval procedures for slaughterhouses to include welfare assessments. For example, in Latvia and France, the competent authorities established an expert group for assessing slaughterhouse layout and construction. Most competent authorities did not update their approval procedure to take account of the requirements on this point included in the Regulation.

Updated CA approval procedures also increased FBO awareness of the requirements for new equipment, and changes to existing equipment required by 2019. There were more non-compliances in the lower throughput slaughterhouses regarding new equipment, in particular for recording parameters for electrical stunning, due to the additional costs.

CAs had given insufficient attention to the requirement for manufacturers to provide instructions with the sale of equipment and also publish certain aspects of the instructions on the Internet. The control of equipment manufacturers is additionally complicated as manufacturers and retailers are often based in different countries. In the UK, the CCA, together with its designated scientific contact point, had required manufacturers to modify instructions so that these took account of the Regulation prior to their installation by a FBO. Manufacturers everywhere had reservations about publishing their instructions as they felt that many of the details were commercially sensitive. The main market for many manufacturers is outside the EU and where requirements of the Regulation were included in instructions, this meant that in addition to getting equipment, operators in third countries also got instructions which included requirements of the Regulation.

### 4.2 NEW FOOD BUSINESS OPERATOR RESPONSIBILITIES

The daily inspections carried out by the official veterinarian give certain assurances to avoid major animal welfare problems, but do not ensure the implementation of the new responsibilities by the food business operator.

In all Member States audited, business operators had acted on their new responsibilities and designated animal welfare officers, put SOPs in place and monitored their implementation.

There was generally better compliance and better animal welfare in the red meat sector whereas there were significant problems with waterbath stunning in the poultry sector. The factors which gave rise to better SOPs and effective own checks included:

1. Guides to good practice: where available, guides to good practice had a strong influence on the quality of SOPs. The guides were prepared by organisations of food business operators in consultation with competent authorities and non-governmental organisations, as required by Article 13 of the Regulation. This helped ensure that guides focused on the main requirements which had an impact on animal welfare. In countries without guides to good practice, SOPs frequently did not cover all of the activities performed in the slaughterhouses. An example of best practice for preparing such guides is the Netherlands where the scientific support body evaluated the guides and, to ensure they were practical, they were trialled for a year before the guides were validated by the central competent authority.
2. Official controls on operator's own checks: the quality of SOPs was better where competent authorities had revised their official controls, so that they also assessed the operator's system of own checks, such as had been implemented by a competent authority in Spain. As animal welfare is largely influenced by the daily management of operations, well documented own checks subject to official audit provided reliable evidence that animal welfare was respected at all stages within the slaughterhouse.

Food business operators often employed consultants to assess their processes and provide scientific advice on handling and stunning of animals. This scientific support brought about improvements to SOPs and benefits to animal welfare.

Small slaughterhouses are defined in the Regulation and many of these food business operators used generic SOPs without adapting them to their business and as a result SOPs did not reflect the real processes in the slaughterhouse. Article 17 of the Regulation (i.e. the need for an animal welfare officer) does not apply to these slaughterhouses but all other requirements such as SOPs do apply. There were slaughterhouses with a throughput above 1000 livestock units, and which therefore did not benefit from the derogation which small slaughterhouses have, where operators and staff found both the need for an AWO and the need to record their checks a heavy administrative burden. Here the AWO is one of a small number of staff carrying out the slaughter procedures and yet is required to monitor many of the tasks which they carry out themselves. Equally in such slaughterhouses the slaughterman assesses 100% of animals as there are only a small number of animals slaughtered daily, and needs to record the outcome of these checks. In contrast in large slaughterhouses usually checks are recorded of a sample of the animals slaughtered so the recording requirement is not so disproportionate.

The following are the main issues in relation to SOPs:

A Planning for the arrival of animals:

The main focus of animal welfare controls has been stunning of animals. Sometimes this single emphasis has meant that the arrival of animals was overlooked. Poor scheduling of the arrival of animals meant lairage capacities were sometimes exceeded, and there were also occurrences of lack of feeding or bedding for animals after more than 12 hours in the lairage. An acceptance by both FBOs and the CA that animals unfit for transport can arrive for slaughter remains a problem in certain Member States.

B Operation and maintenance of equipment:

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9 slaughterhouses with less than 1 000 livestock units of mammals per year.
10 This will be the subject of a separate overview report, focusing on the transport of unfit dairy cows which were the most common category of unfit animal.
Most competent authorities did not verify manufacturers’ instructions, as they did not have the competence for dealing with manufacturers or retailers of equipment, and did not liaise with sections of government who may have relevant powers.

Food business operators made use of manufacturers’ instructions when developing SOPs. These were useful for SOPs on maintenance of equipment, as the legal requirements are very general on this point. However, when manufacturers’ instructions were used for developing SOPs for operating equipment this sometimes gave rise to contradictions with legal requirements, because the Regulation is quite specific on how many tasks must be carried out and the competent authorities had not checked the correspondence of these instructions against the requirements of the Regulation.

C Monitoring of animal welfare:

All operators monitored stunning, but in a majority of Member States the FVO audits uncovered monitoring systems which did not adequately address the requirements of Article 16 of the Regulation. This deficiency was less likely where the authorities were auditing business operator's performance.

Although EFSA has published guidance for monitoring stunning and for selecting appropriate sample sizes to confirm the effectiveness of stunning, none of the FBOs had made use of this guidance in developing their own checks and neither had the CAs promoted the use of the EFSA tools.

In five Member States, operators’ own checks did not include adequate monitoring for signs of consciousness prior to electrical stimulation or signs of life prior to scalding/dressing which gave rise to a small number of serious animal welfare problems.

Particularly in the small to medium size establishments, there were not always registers of the animal welfare officers' activities to improve animal welfare.

Perceived problems in meat quality were seen as a reason for not applying the required electrical parameters for water bath stunning of poultry. Several competent authorities accepted the use of electrical parameters lower than those specified in the Regulation on the basis of the perceived meat quality problems, provided that operators monitored birds for obvious signs of consciousness. None of those authorities was able to provide scientific evidence indicating that the lower currents provide effective stunning; Italy and Belgium had initiated research on this.

4.3 TRAINING

All Member States visited had training available for personnel involved in killing and related operations followed by an independent examination and this had raised awareness of the Regulation throughout the industry. Training also supported the practical implementation of...
SOPs, the technical competence of animal welfare officers as well as the other slaughterhouse personnel.

The type of examination for assessing the level of competence varied:

- Four Member States (Italy, UK, Germany and The Netherlands), used practical exams to assess operator competence before issuing certificates of competence. The FVO considers this as best practice.
- In other Member States, the competent authority relied on a desk based test. Belgium used pictures illustrating practical situations to test the decision making of slaughterhouse staff. This has the advantage that various acceptable/unacceptable scenarios could be presented to the trainee.

Several countries developed a specific training courses for animal welfare officers, again something which the FVO considers as best practice. This specific and more extended training was valued by animal welfare officers.

Both welfare officers and business operators valued the Commission’s brochure “the Animal Welfare officer in the EU” as providing useful guidance.

4.4 SLAUGHTER WITHOUT STUNNING

Article 4 (4) of the Regulation exempts operators from the obligation of stunning animals in slaughterhouses in case of ritual slaughter, and the Competent Authorities had taken various approaches in administering this derogation.

Each Member State visited had a system to grant the derogation to carry out slaughter without stunning. This ranged widely from having additional national legislation and administrative systems to leaving this to the official veterinarian of each slaughterhouse to decide.

In Belgium and France the competent authorities had made this topic a focus of inspections and included specific questions in their checklists for controls. This focus resulted in in food business operators’ producing SOPs which were better adapted to this operation and operators checking for signs of consciousness systematically prior to releasing animals from restraint.

The examination required for granting certificates of competence was better adapted for personnel carrying out slaughter without stunning in those Member States which had also made this issue a priority for controls. Where the Competent Authorities had not focused attention on slaughter without stunning, requirements on the use of knives and monitoring absence of signs of life were not an integral part of the exam which was based on operations concerning slaughter with stunning.

Ritual slaughter was also a reason for not applying the required electrical parameters for water bath stunning of poultry.

5 **OVERALL CONCLUSIONS**

Changes made by food business operators in response to their new responsibilities have been more successful in improving animal welfare where guides to good practice were available and where official controls were adapted to focus on operator's procedures and records.

Official controls have an active role in improving the compliance of food business operator's procedures and activities as evidenced by the fact that gaps found in operator's procedures occurred mostly where an audit approach had not been adopted as part of official controls.

As observed for waterbath stunning of poultry, official controls based on assessment of specific risk factors linked to animal welfare and good reporting systems allow competent authorities to target their controls better and to improve operator's compliance in a difficult area. The availability of guides to good practice in the specific sector also plays an important role in achieving compliance.

There are wide variations in the way Member States have operated the derogation for slaughter without stunning, as the Regulation allows flexibility for Member States to decide the level of the Competent Authority which grants the derogation and how such operations are subsequently administered.

The correlation between the FVO desk study and audits indicates that authorities with better documented control procedures (i.e. The Netherlands and Poland) had a better level of preparedness which translated into better compliance by food business operators.

6 **RECOMMENDATIONS TO ALL MEMBER STATES**

The following recommendations are based on the conclusions from this series of audits and are made to all Member States in general. Member States should ensure the following controls and arrangements are in place:

1. Audits are part of official controls so that FBOs have suitable SOPs and effectively monitor animal welfare

2. Official Controls follow documented procedures and are targeted so that they bring about improvements in compliance with the most common and significant problems, e.g. waterbath stunning of poultry.

3. Organisations of business operators, particularly in the poultry sector, develop guides to good practice.

4. The manufacturers and/or retailers of restraining and stunning equipment provide appropriate operating instructions.
5. Suitable training courses are available for slaughterhouse staff.

Eight out of thirteen Member States audited received a recommendation to address failures to apply electric stunning parameters for poultry. Such widespread non compliances are likely to have a negative effect on the internal market and trade with Third Countries, the Commission services therefore will give this issue particular attention in its follow up actions.

The Member States are also encouraged to participate in a quantitative survey on slaughter without stunning, requested by the Commission services, so that a more complete picture of how the derogation on slaughter without stunning is administered.

These issues will be discussed further with all Member States at a Better Training for Safer Food event in October 2015 to discuss the general outcomes from these audits.

7 ACTIONS TAKEN OR ENVISAGED BY THE COMMISSION SERVICES

The Commission services have provided Competent Authorities with access to documents identified as good practice, as well as Member States’ mandatory notifications, via a collaborative group site on the Commission's database (CIRCABC) for sharing information with, amongst others, public administrations. Member States can also upload further documents to this site.

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) proposes to co-ordinate activities of the national scientific contact points designated by Member States.\(^{13}\)

In addition to or to complement the work of the network convened by EFSA, the Commission services will further consider possible actions to co-ordinate Competent Authorities on issues arising from implementation of the Regulation. In particular to share experiences regarding best practices on implementation of:

- Risk based controls and analysis of non-compliances.
- Strategies to improve compliance with the most common and significant problems, such as waterbath stunning of poultry.
- Audit techniques so that FBOs have suitable SOPs and effectively monitor animal welfare.
- Organisations of business operators, particularly in the poultry sector, develop guides to good practice.
- The manufacturers and/or retailers of restraining and stunning equipment provide

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\(^{13}\) Article 20 of the Regulation (a) scientific and technical expertise relating to the approval of slaughterhouses and the development of new stunning methods; (b) scientific opinions on the instructions provided by manufacturers on the use and maintenance of restraining and stunning equipment; (c) scientific opinions on guides to good practice; (d) recommendations for the purposes of this Regulation, in particular in relation to inspections and audits; (e) opinions on the capacity and suitability of training bodies.
appropriate operating instructions.

- Suitable training courses for slaughterhouse staff.

  The competent authority's response to the recommendations can be found at:

## ANNEX 1 – LEGAL REFERENCES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legal Reference</th>
<th>Official Journal</th>
<th>Title</th>
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**ANNEX 2 Details of the 13 audits which were the basis of the overview**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Country and report reference number</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Latvia 7077, Italy 7075, Spain 7079, United Kingdom 7080, Denmark 7061, Germany 7073, Czech Republic 7060, Hungary 7072, Belgium 7059, The Netherlands 7078</td>
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<td>2015</td>
<td>Poland 7020, France 7427</td>
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