

Minutes of the Working group meeting for the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health on poultry killing methods for disease control purposes held in Brussels on 23 January 2007

Attendance:

All Member States except BE and EE + Norway and Iceland

Topics presented

Most of the day was dedicated to different presentations by the Member States on the killing techniques used for disease control purposes in poultry. Experiences from the Netherlands, Italy, Germany, Hungary, the UK, Ireland, Denmark, Sweden and France were presented.

The two EFSA opinions on the protection of animals at the time of killing were presented by Dr. van Wenzlawowicz (member of the working group of the EFSA) while the relevant OIE guideline on killing for disease control purposes was commented by Pf. Raj.

Main lines of the future initiative of the Commission on the protection of animals at the time of killing were also introduced.

Main outcomes

Member States tend to use specialised private companies as to carry out the depopulation of poultry. This ensures a high level of technical competence for handling gas and help competent authorities to concentrate on the supervision and the overall coordination of the depopulation. Some contracts foresee in particular a real time exercise at least once a year.

Co-operation between Member States (e.g. experience of “Nordic countries”) to exchange knowledge and practical experiences has proven to be beneficial also in view of possible exchange of killing devices by respecting stringent biosecurity measures.

On this occasion one delegation also emphasized the importance of transparency of the operations and the need for an independent evaluation of the process from a welfare point of view.

In addition, in some regions in Germany, farmers are previously asked to design and build their farms as to envisage a specific method of depopulation. Methods of killing on the farm are also to be mentioned for other purposes such as in the case of spent hens or when an accident occurs in a building.

A balance between different priorities (human health, animal health, animal welfare and environment) needs to be sought. Some delegations considered that in the restriction zones established around an outbreak the priority for animal health will be

shifted towards the priority for animal welfare with increasing distance from the outbreak site.

The main techniques for killing poultry in high numbers that have been favoured by the Member States are the use of gas mixtures in containers and in-house gassing. Carbon dioxide was mostly used. The use of inert gas (Argon, Nitrogen) was also presented. Carbon monoxide was also used but presented a number of disadvantages (toxic and explosive).

The use of in-house gassing was favoured in big units as it prevents handling. However a number of specific problems needed to be monitored (temperature of the gas, concentration and duration of exposure is much longer than in containers). Use of solid carbon dioxide has also been used as it appears easier to handle than liquid gas.

The use of gas mixtures for waterfowls (ducks and geese) was discussed and a number of Member States preferred to use mobile waterbath killers although the capacity is limited. Waterfowl tend to be particularly resistant to carbon dioxide and to anoxia.