

Mr James Paice MP
Minister of State for Agriculture and Food
Defra
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Thursday, 21 October 2010

I am writing to you regarding the new EU rules that will require compulsory labelling of meat slaughtered without pre-stunning for religious reasons. The BHA represents the large and growing population of non-religious people in the UK, many of whom do not wish to consume meat slaughtered without pre-stunning for ethical reasons. We therefore welcome the passing of Amendment 205 of the *Report on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the provision of food information to consumers*. We would welcome news from your department on the planned implementation of the report in the UK.

We have been particularly concerned about the issue of labelling because it has been suggested that only the easiest cuts of meat are prepared for halal and kosher consumption and the remainder, as much as two-thirds of the meat, is sold on the general market. The number of animals slaughtered in pain and distress is therefore up to three times the number needed to provide the market for kosher and halal meat and the general public are forced to unknowingly support a practice which they may find unethical.

However, we have further concerns regarding the ritual slaughter of animals that go beyond the labelling of meat. It is the view of the British Humanist Association that, if it is justified on grounds of animal welfare to enforce a general requirement for pre-stunning, there can be no justification for any exception, whether on religious or other grounds. It is relevant to note that slaughter without pre-stunning is already banned in several countries, including Norway, Sweden and Switzerland where the religious communities involved have adapted without apparent difficulty; and that within the Jewish and Muslim communities, the laws on religious slaughter are interpreted differently, such that within both communities there are many who do not consider that pre-stunning before slaughter contravenes religious laws.

We believe that it would be a positive step for the Government to work with Muslim and Jewish communities to explore ways in which animals can be slaughtered in accordance with religious methods but which include stunning animals (before slaughter rather than after cutting) to minimise

harm and suffering. We also believe that the Government should base its policy in this area on scientific evidence of the pain and suffering caused to animals which are not pre-stunned.

I look forward to your reply on this important matter.

Andrew Copson
Chief Executive