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Dear Mr Orland,

PRE-STUNNING

Thank you for your letter of 7 August to Hilary Benn about pre-stunning. I have been asked to reply.

Thank you for sending in a copy of your report.

However, changes are being made to EU legislation affecting the welfare of animals at the time of killing. The EU Commission published a proposal for a Council regulation on the protection of animals at the time of killing, in September 2008. The proposed regulation will replace Directive 93/119 on the protection of animals at the time of slaughter or killing. The text of the proposed regulation has been under consideration since last autumn and a Presidency compromise text was agreed in the Agriculture Council on 22 – 23 June.

The Council regulation will require all animals to be stunned before slaughter but makes an exception for animals slaughtered in accordance with religious rites, so long as the animal is slaughtered in a slaughterhouse. The slaughter of poultry outside a slaughterhouse by their owner for private domestic consumption and killing animals during cultural or sporting events is outside the scope of the Council regulation.

We would prefer to see all animals stunned before slaughter. However the Government also respects the right of religious communities to eat meat prepared in accordance with their religious beliefs. Whenever animals are slaughtered, the process must be humane and comply with UK regulations governing animal welfare at slaughter. Where animals are not stunned before slaughter, the operation must be carried out without causing unnecessary suffering, and in compliance with specific controls. The UK has additional rules regulating religious slaughter which go further than existing EU laws and require religious slaughter to take place in licensed slaughterhouses (approved premises). As a result Official Veterinarians of the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) monitor and enforce the rules set out in the UK regulations daily.

The new Council regulation allows member states to make national rules to maintain existing measures to protect welfare, where the existing national rules are stricter than those in the Council regulation. We would not wish to see welfare standards fall in the UK



and will be looking carefully at the use of national rules to ensure standards are maintained.

Some Muslim groups do accept that a recoverable stun is compatible with their beliefs. A DVD showing the benefits of this approach has recently been produced in the UK by the English Beef and Lamb Executive with the cooperation of three UK based Halal Accreditation bodies, The Halal Food Authority, UK Halal Corporation and the Halal Monitoring Committee along with input from the Muslim Council of Britain and other Muslim leaders here in the UK. I hope this will lead to wider acceptance of recoverable stunning methods amongst Muslims in this country.

The slaughter of animals without prior stunning is an issue in which many people and organisations are interested, and we will continue to engage with interested parties in order to identify approaches that improve welfare and which are compatible with religious beliefs.

I hope that this letter addresses your concerns.

Yours sincerely,



Simone Cooper
Defra - Customer Contact Unit