

### **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

the welfare of various types of livestock (see below) whose movements were restricted by disease-control measures. The booklet on sheep covered general guidelines for the management of flock feeding, lambing of ewes away from the farm, regulation of accommodation and stocking rates, humane destruction, and management of non-animal movements (eg deliveries of feedstuff). Although there is some information in these notes that may be of general relevance in dealing with welfare aspects of foot and mouth disease control, the guidelines are very specifically focused on the particular circumstances in the UK during the spring of 2001.

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*Protecting the welfare of sheep under foot and mouth movement restrictions* March 2001. Foot and Mouth Disease Public Information Factsheet 10. Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. 8 pp A4. Available from Animal Welfare Division, Area 508, 1a Page Street, London SW1P 4PQ, UK, and also at [www.maff.gov.uk](http://www.maff.gov.uk). Similar factsheets are available also for beef cattle (Factsheet 7), pigs (Factsheet 8), goats (Factsheet 9), and dairy cattle and growing heifers (Factsheet 11).

### ***Biosecurity***

The outbreak of foot and mouth disease in the UK in February 2001, caused by the strain of the virus that has been responsible for epidemics in many countries around the world in recent years, has raised questions about the adequacy of the UK and European defences against exotic livestock infections. The growth in global free trade and the ever-increasing international movement of humans, animals and livestock products present a serious challenge to the maintenance of rigorous biosecurity measures. The introduction of non-indigenous species, whether they be plants, animals, or infectious agents, is known to be a major threat to the conservation of biological diversity and also to the welfare of animals — domestic and/or wild. In New Zealand, this subject has a high public profile and one body, the MAF Biosecurity Authority, is responsible for all of these issues. This authority produces a six-weekly magazine, *Biosecurity* (see below), that covers the fields of biosecurity and animal health, animal welfare, and plant and forest health.

The articles included in the recent (May 2001) issue of this magazine, which include educating people about biosecurity, improving animal health surveillance, reporting on recently discovered non-indigenous organisms and strategies for their control, animal welfare issues, and new phytosanitary requirements for timber imports, emphasise the inter-relatedness of these subjects and the importance of the unifying concept of biosecurity. This contrasts with the situation in the UK and in Europe as a whole, in which animal welfare, domestic animal health, and wildlife and ecosystem conservation tend to be dealt with by separate bureaucracies.

This magazine *Biosecurity* is, so it says inside the front cover, “of special interest to all those with a stake in New Zealand’s agriculture, horticulture, forestry, animal welfare and environment”. It deserves attention, also, outside New Zealand as a model for helping to raise public awareness of the important issues of biosecurity.

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*Biosecurity* May 2001. A magazine published six-weekly by MAF Biosecurity Authority. 23 pp A4 paperback. ISSN 1174-4618. Available from Biosecurity Authority, PO Box 2526, Wellington, New Zealand, and also at [www.maf.govt.nz/Biosecurity/index.htm](http://www.maf.govt.nz/Biosecurity/index.htm).

### **Guidelines for nonhuman primate re-introductions**

Primate re-introductions are being undertaken with increasing frequency. Some are aimed at restoring primates to their natural habitats as part of a conservation programme, and others are motivated by concerns for welfare of captive animals. These new guidelines — still in draft stage for comment at present — have been developed by the Re-introductions Specialist Group