

Agriculture Council

EU urged to end “excessive” ritual slaughter

By Ed Bray | Wednesday 16 May 2012

Swedish calls for EU action against the “overuse” of animal slaughter without stunning – used for ‘halal’ and ‘kosher’ meats - were supported by a number of member states at the Agriculture Council, on 15 May. A group of member states, including the UK, the Netherlands, Denmark and Latvia, supported Sweden’s declaration, urging the European Commission to draw up EU-level guidelines for abattoirs and new meat labelling rules.

Current legislation on the protection of animals at slaughter provides an exemption from the requirement to stun before killing if required by certain religious rites, such as for ‘kosher’ and ‘halal’ meat. But Swedish Minister Eskil Erlandsson condemned the “excessive” use of non-religious slaughter without stunning in some member states, suggesting that some meat producers were abusing the exemption. Consumers are increasingly concerned by animal welfare, Erlandsson added. The Commission’s Food and Veterinary Office must carry out targeted controls to ensure the exemption is properly applied, he said, while also promoting harmonised rules covering abattoir personnel.

Belgium stressed the need for specific labels for meat produced from ritual slaughter.

Standing in for Health Commissioner John Dalli, Agriculture Commissioner Dacian Ciolos said that the EU executive was drawing up a report on the impact of labelling scheduled for next year, as part of the EU’s animal welfare strategy. The Commission will await the results of the study before considering any further action, he said. The EU agreed to defer the introduction of labels on ritual slaughter as part of the food labelling package agreed last year. Ciolos was also quick to stress that the EU’s slaughter rules are left to member states to implement and pointed to a series of Commission recommendations published in 2011.