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Graz, 3 May 2015

Commissioner Karmenu Vella
Commissioner for Environment,
Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
European Commission
B-1049 Brussels
Belgium

Commissioner Andriukaitis
Commissioner for Health and Food Safety
European Commission
B-1049 Brussels
Belgium

Call on the European Commission

Dear Commissioner Andriukaitis

fair-fish international association calls on the European Commission to:

- Liaise with Member States which have aquaculture sectors to ensure that fish are slaughtered humanely in line with EU law
- To produce the report, also required by EU legislation, to introduce humane fish slaughter requirements to facilitate the sustainable development of the aquaculture sector.

EU legislation requires animals being killed for food, including fish, to be spared avoidable pain, distress or suffering. Now that humane slaughter equipment designed to meet EU humane slaughter requirements for fish is commercially available¹, it is clear that suffering to fish during slaughter and processing can be avoided.

Preventing suffering to animals used in fisheries is a fundamental part of sustainable development as well as a requirement of the Lisbon Treaty.

Humane slaughter methods are currently practised in the UK for both salmon and trout following requirements of supermarkets and certification schemes. UK supermarkets are also involved in the development of humane slaughter for other species. However, we have seen little evidence that humane slaughter is widely practised in other EU countries with important aquaculture sectors. This should be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Information about poor welfare at slaughter has been assembled both by EFSA and the OIE which should be helpful for Member States to enforce the law and for the Commission to produce its report.

¹ For example by the firm Ace-Aquatec <http://www.aceaquatec.com/hsu-overview>. This is given specifically as an example and not to promote this company.

Poor welfare at slaughter can result from design of slaughter facilities causing stress or injury to fish, excessive crowding at slaughter, poor water quality and ineffective or unsuitable stunning methods.

The OIE Code states that²:

- Water quality should be assessed on arrival of fish before unloading, and corrective action taken if required
- Crowding periods should be as short and infrequent as possible to avoid stressful conditions
- Handling should be minimised and preferably fish should not be handled out of water
- The following methods should not be used if it is feasible to use mechanical or electrical stunning instead (which for salmon, it is feasible, especially mechanical stunning): CO₂ and/or ice, asphyxiation by removal from water, and exsanguination without stunning as they result in poor welfare
- Percussive or electrical stunning should be used for salmon

EFSA identifies the following measures to address welfare problems related to the stunning and slaughter of farmed salmon³:

- Slaughter by asphyxia, exposure to CO₂ in water, chilling and chilling with CO₂ exposure should not be used
- Exsanguination without prior stunning should not be used
- Those involved in killing fish should be trained and skilled in handling and welfare
- Crowding of fish should not be to a level where the fish show distress; indicators for distress are colour change, escape behaviour and air gulping
- Monitor fish as they leave the pumping system for presence of fresh injuries and excessive exhaustion; carry out visual checks after pumping for wounds and injuries
- Percussive machines should be adjusted for size by skilled personnel, and should have a back-up system
- Electrical stunning should be done with sufficient electrical field or current to stun to unconsciousness within 1 second
- When followed by percussive stunning or maceration, the field or current of electrical stunning should prevent fish from recovering before these events
- When followed by exsanguination, the field or current of electrical stunning should prevent fish from recovering during bleed-out
- In exsanguination, major vessels should be cut with a sharp knife to ensure rapid bleed-out.

Where fish experience poor welfare at slaughter because slaughter operators have not respected the OIE Code and the EFSA recommendations, there is likely to be a breach of Article 3 of the Slaughter Regulation (1099/2009) as the fish have not been spared avoidable pain, distress and suffering.

Action is needed by the Commission and the Member States to put this right. I attach further information of the legislative background.

Yours sincerely ...

² Chapter 7.3, OIE Aquatic Animal Health Code

³ Scientific Opinion of the Panel on Animal Health and Welfare on Species-Specific Welfare Aspects of the Main Systems of Stunning and Killing of Farmed Atlantic Salmon, 2009

Legislative background

Article 3 of the EU Slaughter Directive, which covers general requirements for killing and related operations, states:

Animals shall be spared any avoidable pain, distress or suffering during their killing and related operations.

Article 1, which covers subject matter and scope, states that

This Regulation lays down rules for the killing of animals bred or kept for the production of food, wool, skin, fur or other products as well as the killing of animals for the purpose of depopulation and for related operations. However as regards fish, only the requirements laid down in Article 3(1) shall apply.

Article 27, which covers reporting by the European Commission, states that

No later than 8 December 2014, the Commission shall submit to the European Parliament and to the Council a report on the possibility of introducing certain requirements regarding the protection of fish at the time of killing taking into account animal welfare aspects as well as the socio-economic and environmental impacts. This report shall, if appropriate, be accompanied by legislative proposals with a view to amending this Regulation, by including specific rules regarding the protection of fish at the time of killing.

It should be noted that the word "shall" is used in EU legislation to denote compulsory components of the law.

Thank you for your consideration.

Kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

fair-fish international association



Billo Heinzpeter Studer
President