



Halal and Kosher Meat

At the moment, there is no legal requirement to label meat that is Halal or Kosher, and there is no requirement to label meat from animals that have not been stunned before slaughter.

Cattle that have not been pre-stunned take 22 to 40 seconds to lose consciousness after their throats have been slit, suffering “very significant pain and distress”.

(Farm Animal Welfare Council report, June 2003).

HSLD, as well as the RSPCA and the British Veterinary Association, supports

- **mandatory labelling of all meat, sold in shops, coming from animals that have not been stunned before slaughtering;**
- **mandatory reporting on menus of all dishes, served in restaurants and cafeterias, coming from animals that have not been stunned before slaughtering.**

All the meat eaten in the UK comes from slaughtered animals, although those of us who eat meat might wish otherwise.

We care about the welfare of those animals, throughout their lives, and this is covered under EU and UK regulations. Their welfare at the time of slaughter or killing is covered and monitored under EU Directive 93/119 and UK regulations, which state that it is an offence to cause or permit an animal to suffer avoidable excitement, pain or suffering. In order to minimise suffering, animals must be stunned before slaughter. However, in order to meet the religious requirements of some religious communities, licenced Shechita (Jewish) and Halal (Muslim) slaughterhouses are exempted.

Most Halal authorities allow pre-stunning, so most Halal meat is in fact from pre-stunned animals – but anyone buying Halal meat cannot tell if it comes from pre-stunned animals.

Around half of meat from Shechita slaughterhouses is not considered Kosher, and ends up unlabelled on the general market.

As humanists and as secularists, it really should be no concern of ours whether a piece of meat that we buy and eat comes from an animal that is considered by a religious group to have been

slaughtered in accordance with that group’s traditions.

Our concern is whether the meat has come from an animal that can be considered to have been humanely slaughtered, based on the best available current scientific evidence.

There is a case for arguing that animal welfare concerns should override the beliefs of religious communities. This is a highly contentious issue on which we have chosen not to take a position.

However, we believe that we should have the right to know whether the meat we buy and eat comes from humanely-slaughtered animals. This information is not now available, and we therefore support the mandatory labelling, or reporting on menus, of meat that has been slaughtered without pre-stunning.

We believe that this right is equivalent to the right of members of faith groups to know whether the meat they buy and eat has been slaughtered in accordance with their beliefs. Vendors are rightly allowed to label meat that has been sanctioned by a particular religious authority; meat that is falsely labelled as sanctioned by a religious authority is rightly covered by the UK’s Trade Description regulations.