

SCIENTIFIC NETWORK ON RISK ASSESSMENT IN ANIMAL HEALTH AND WELFARE

Minutes of 9th Network of the National Contact Points (NCPs) for scientific support under Art 20 of Council Regulation (EC) 1099/2009



20-21 March 2024

09:40 - 17:30 / 13:00 - 16:00

Minutes agreed on 15 April 2024

Location: Webconference

Attendees:

- Network Participants:

Country	Organisation
Austria	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fachstelle für tiergerechte Tierhaltung und Tierschutz
Belgium	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Flemish Government - Animal Welfare department• University of Namur• SPW ARNE
Bulgaria	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Risk Assessment Center on Food Chain
Croatia	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ministry of Agriculture
Cyprus	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Veterinary Services
Czech Republic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• State Veterinary Administration
Denmark	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Danish Veterinary and Food Administration
Finland	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Finnish Center for Animal Welfare, Natural Resources Institute Luke Finland
France	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• General directorate of food (DGAL)
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Friedrich-Loeffler-Institut (FLI)
Greece	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ministry of Rural Development and Food
Iceland	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Icelandic Food and Veterinary Authority• Matvælastofnun-Icelandic Food and Veterinary Authority
Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine Ireland
Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Istituto Zooprofilattico della Lombardia e dell'Emilia Romagna (IZSLER)
Luxembourg	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Luxembourg Veterinary and Food Administration (ALVA)
Malta	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Veterinary Regulation Directorate
Norway	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Norwegian Veterinary Institute
Poland	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• General Veterinary Inspectorate
Portugal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Directorate General for Food and Veterinary (DGAV)
Slovakia	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Slovak Academy of Sciences, IPAR
Slovenia	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Administration of the Republic of Slovenia for Food safety, Veterinary Sector and Plant Protection
Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Institute of Agrifood Research and Technology (IRTA)



MEETING MINUTES – 20-21 March 2024

9th Network of the National Contact Points (NCPs) for scientific support under Art 20 of Council Regulation (EC) 1099/2009

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Spanish Food Safety and Nutrition Agency (AESAN)
Sweden	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU)

- Observers:
 - Switzerland:** Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office (FSVO)
- European Commission:
 - DG SANTE:** Unit G.3: Ester Alaez Pons and Christian Juliusson; Unit F.2 Desmond Maguire
- EFSA:
 - BIOHAW** Chiara Fabris (chair), Denise Candiani (vice-chair), Sean Ashe, Oana-Maria BALMOS, Eleonora CARO, Roberta D’ALESSIO, Michaela HEMPEN, Aikaterini MANAKIDOU, Cristina ROJO GIMENO, Neil Joseph TIRCHETT, Yves Pascal VAN DER STEDE, Frank VERDONK, Marika VITALI, Martina Benedetta ZANNA



1. Welcome and apologies for absence

The Chair welcomed the participants.

Apologies were received from the Network representatives from Romania and the Netherlands.

2. Adoption of agenda

The agenda was adopted without changes.

3. Joint session AHAW Network (AW topic) and scientific NCPs Network

The first day of the meeting (20th of March 2024) was held as a joint session among the scientific NCPs Network and the AHAW Network (AW topic).

3.1 Presentation of the new EFSA engagement strategy with stakeholders for Animal welfare mandates

Yves Van der Stede, team leader of the Animal Welfare (AW) Team, presented the context of the new EFSA engagement strategy with stakeholders (SHs) in relation to AW.

The recently published activities that engage with EFSA's SHs were also presented, such as:

- the call for evidence for the scientific opinion on the welfare of animals kept for fur production, with deadline on 19 April 2024 and the relevant links:

Raccoon dogs:

[https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/call/call\[1\]evidence-scientific-opinion-welfare-animals\[1\]kept-fur-production-raccoon-dogs](https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/call/call[1]evidence-scientific-opinion-welfare-animals[1]kept-fur-production-raccoon-dogs)

Foxes:

[https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/call/call\[1\]evidence-scientific-opinion-welfare-animals\[1\]kept-fur-production-foxes](https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/call/call[1]evidence-scientific-opinion-welfare-animals[1]kept-fur-production-foxes)

Minks:

[https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/call/call\[1\]evidence-scientific-opinion-welfare-animals\[1\]kept-fur-production-mink](https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/call/call[1]evidence-scientific-opinion-welfare-animals[1]kept-fur-production-mink)

Chinchillas:

[https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/call/call\[1\]evidence-scientific-opinion-welfare-animals\[1\]kept-fur-production-chinchillas](https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/call/call[1]evidence-scientific-opinion-welfare-animals[1]kept-fur-production-chinchillas)

- the open call on 'Developing a methodology to assess positive animal welfare using behaviour analysis and ethological approaches', available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/tender-details/14842>.

The objective of this call is to develop a robust methodology to assess and interpret animals' choices and define and validate indicators for positive animal welfare on farm. Deadline is on 15 May 2023.



In addition, EFSA is preparing an open grant call for a pilot project on primary field collection of welfare data on pigs (most likely on sows and piglets). Participants were informed that an online meeting is scheduled for April 11th, 2024, to discuss the project, engage with potential applicants and collect information for the optimal design of the call before launching it (provisional date is May 2024).

During the Questions & Answers session, it was asked which organisations are eligible to apply for this open grant. It was explained that all EFSA Article 36 organisations can apply.

3.2 EFSA Sharepoint Teams groups

EFSA updated Network members about the intention to implement the EFSA platforms for further communications (Share Point and Teams groups). Network members will be contacted to enable their EFSA profiles.

3.3 Revision of the EU legislation on the protection of animals in the context of the Farm-to-Fork (F2F) strategy and other context

The European Commission (EC) representative Christian Juliusson from DG SANTE G.3 Unit (Animal Welfare) presented the ongoing activities of the EC in relation to the F2F strategy.

The EC commitments include the revision of the AW legislation, and consider options for AW labelling, to better transmit value through the food chain.

Two legislative proposals were presented: i) on the protection of animals during transport and ii) on the protection of dogs and cats.

The presented legislative proposal on animal transport has specific focus on: i) journey times, with special limitations in the case of e.g. transport to slaughter, of unweaned calves, or under extreme temperatures; ii) space allowance, with species-specific uniform rules based on allometric equation, and specific requirements in the case of high temperature; iii) extreme temperatures; iv) transport of unweaned calves; v) transport of dogs and cats; vi) exports and imports, with EU rules to apply until destination, for exports, and, in the case of imports, EU rules (or equivalent) from the point of departure in a non-EU country until destination in the EU; and, vii) digitalization and traceability.

The legislative proposal on the protection of dogs and cats includes breeders, pet shops and shelters; it foresees obligations in terms of identification of dogs and cats with microchip, registration in a national database and interoperability of national databases. EU rules (or equivalent conditions) must be applied also to pets entering the EU.

In addition, an EC 'roadmap' for upcoming EFSA Scientific opinions (2025–2030) was presented, including mandates on the welfare of several animal species, such as sheep & goats and farmed fish.

Finally, an update was given on the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) "Fur Free Europe" on the phasing out and ban of cages for fur animals. An EFSA scientific opinion on the welfare of fur animals is expected by March 2025 and by March 2026



the EC will communicate on the results of the assessment and the measures it intends to take.

During the Questions & Answers session, it was asked about the revision of the EU legislations on the protection of animals at the time of killing s and on the protection of zoo animals. It was replied that the revision of Council Regulation (EC) 1099/2009 is still under discussion, as well as the legislation on AW labelling. It was also emphasised that the protection of zoo animals is not under the responsibility of DG SANTE but of DG ENV. There is currently no information about any modifications to the relevant policies.

3.4 Training content available in the BTSF ACADEMY in multilingual format

Desmond Maguire, from DG SANTE F.2 Unit, presented the objectives and activity of 'Better Training for Safer Food' (BTSF).

BTSF, is a DG SANTE training initiative since 2005 for EU and non-EU official control staff, and sometimes stakeholders, having the objective of providing high levels of competence and knowledge of EU rules leading to harmonised approach to control systems and enforcement, and facilitating trade and market access.

The areas covered by BTSF are six: i) animal health and welfare, ii) borders, movements, official controls, iii) food and feed, iv) one health, v) plants, and vi) contingency and risk planning, for a total of > 3,000 events (approx. 20% of activities in non-EU countries) and > 85,000 of participants, since 2005.

The training is usually organised by external contractors in the form of workshops, workshops and sustained training missions, or eLearning, and following the principles of 'knowledge/experience sharing' and 'networking', and the 'train-the-trainer' approach. The eLearning platform was meticulously explained, e-learning trainings consist in eight modules of eight hours each and six additional modules that have been newly produced, of six hours each. The modules related to AW topics are: AW at depopulation, AW at depopulation specific for poultry and AW of broilers.

All training materials are available in the BTSF ACADEMY, which consists in the BTSF LIBRARY (with over 100 thematic courses uploaded), course forums, Newsletters, reports and statistics. The BTSF ACADEMY and BTSF training material are available in 22 European languages, with possibility to select the desired language.

It was emphasised that DG SANTE gives open access to the BTSF Library to all registered users (Competent Authority officials in EU and non-EU) to all existing and future course training materials and eLearning. Certain courses will also be available to stakeholders.

During the Questions & Answers session, it was asked if there are training events from the BTSF ACADEMY for companion animals and it was replied that this is not covered under the programme. National Contact Points can get access to BTSF ACADEMY, and any Competent Authority officials can have free access to all course training materials in the BTSF ACADEMY (and BTSF Library) upon registration to access BTSF Library training materials and to receive BTSF Newsletters and reports.



3.5 Update on the 2023-2024 activities of EFSA on animal welfare

The ongoing activities of the EFSA AW Team in relation to the new EC mandates on the welfare of turkeys on farm and on the welfare of beef cattle were presented.

3.5.1 Welfare of turkeys on farm

3.5.1.1 Mandate on the welfare of turkeys on farm

Oana-Maria Balmos provided a comprehensive overview of the Terms of Reference (ToRs) of the EC mandate on the welfare of turkeys on farm that EFSA received in October 2023 with a deadline of December 2025.

In accordance with Regulation (EC) 178/2002, EFSA was asked to develop a Technical Report (TR; Article 31) <https://open.efsa.europa.eu/questions/EFSA-Q-2023-00648> and a Scientific Opinion (SO; Article 29) <https://open.efsa.europa.eu/questions/EFSA-Q-2023-00647> on the welfare of turkeys in the farms. Target populations for both outputs are turkeys *Meleagris gallopavo gallopavo* of all ages (breeding turkeys, poults, and turkeys kept for meat production), including those in the hatcheries.

Some information on the approach to the mandate were also provided with special emphasis to a series of activities that were carried out with the engagement of stakeholders as preparatory work for the development of the draft scientific outputs (TR and SO):

- an EFSA call for evidence focused on eight main topics listed in the mandate was launched between 7th December 2023 and 31st January 2024 (PC-0741);
- an online survey to collect data on the housing systems currently used in the EU for keeping turkeys and the factors listed in the mandate was submitted to stakeholders by an EFSA external contractor;
- an exercise on the animal-based measures (ABMs) assessed at the slaughterhouses to monitor on-farm welfare was carried out with Member States (MSs) representatives of the EFSA scientific NCPs Network during the 2023 annual meeting, and
- an online survey on mutilations performed on turkeys was submitted to the members of the EFSA AW Network (see the follow-up exercise in the next agenda point).

During the Questions & Answers session, it was asked whether the mutilations survey has also been sent for collecting information to producers; EFSA explained that an EFSA contractor prepared and sent a survey with some questions on mutilations performed to turkeys to different type of stakeholders, including representatives from the industry.

3.5.1.2 Mutilations on turkeys: feedback on EFSA survey

Cristina Rojo Gimeno involved the meeting participants in an exercise on mutilations performed on turkeys (*Meleagris gallopavo gallopavo*), as follow-up of a survey that was sent to the AW Network members prior to the meeting. The aim of the survey was to understand the mutilations carried out in turkeys and focused on beak trimming, detoeing and de-snooding. The results of the survey were presented and



discussed, and unclarities were resolved. The outcomes of the exercise will be taken into consideration by EFSA working group members as basis for their scientific risk assessment when addressing the specific mandate ToR (ToR B, request 2.e) on mutilations performed on turkeys and for description of mutilations included in the technical report. A separate technical report with details of the exercise and the results will be produced and published on EFSA's website.

3.5.2 Welfare of beef cattle

3.5.2.1 Mandate on the welfare of beef cattle

Sean Ashe presented the background and ToRs of the EC mandate on the welfare of beef cattle. The mandate consists of 3 ToRs. The first is a request to describe the various beef cattle husbandry systems currently in use throughout the EU. The second is the request for an animal welfare assessment to be carried out various topics for beef cattle on farm. The topics are cattle while housed, cattle kept outside, mutilations, weaning, breeding and genetics and the welfare of cull cows being kept for beef production. The 3rd and final ToR is a request to generate a list of welfare indicators (ABMs) that can be recorded and assessed in an abattoir or a slaughter house that are indicative of the welfare of beef cattle on farm.

3.5.2.2 Mutilations on beef cattle: feedback on EFSA survey

Marika Vitali ran an exercise on mutilations in beef cattle following a survey that was sent to the Network members prior to the meeting. The results of the survey were presented and discussed. A Technical report will be produced out of this exercise and published on EFSA website separately, with details on the exercise, including the results. The outcomes of the exercise will be used as a preparatory work for the ongoing EFSA draft SO on welfare of beef cattle.

3.6 Exchange of information - Presentations by Networks representatives

In this session, representative of both Networks proposed topics for exchange of information and plenary discussions.

3.6.1 Pig tails in the Netherlands

The AHAW Network representative from the Netherlands presented the current situation in the Netherlands regarding tail docking practice in pigs.

Baseline measurements were performed in three slaughterhouses, on a monthly basis for one year. These measurements to identify a 'status quo' is necessary to be able to assess the risk for tail docking and follow developments on farm. A follow-up trial with Artificial Intelligence (AI) for image recognition of tails is currently running, by registering automatically the ABMs in order to score and compare the length of and damage to the tails. Try-out to see if AI is a promising tool for an enforcement agency/ risk assessor to keep track of what happens in practice. Results will support the preparation of an advice to the Dutch Authority (NVWA) and possibly to the Dutch Ministry. The data obtained may be used for validation of sector initiatives with benchmarking purposes. The Dutch authorities are discussing the possibility to phase



out the tail docking in 2030 and a specific Dutch working group on tail docking of pigs has been set up for that.

Subsequently, a series of questions were asked to the meeting participants to gather information about the situation in their countries.

During the plenary discussion, it was clarified that in Denmark regulations exist with the aim to gradually stop tail docking. The farmer can continue tail docking if he can document problems with tail biting. If there is no problems with tail-biting the farmer should gradually stop tail docking for at least a few pens per farm, in order to learn how to keep pigs with intact tails. In Germany the proportion of undocked pigs in Germany is unknown but probably lower than 10 %, in Italy the minimum proportion of undocked tail individuals is 15% and there is an experimental program for monitoring this ABM at slaughterhouses (Classyfarm). Similarly, in Ireland the aim is for 2 pens per farm to rear undocked pigs as part of a specific inspection program on tail biting risks. In other countries, e.g., Sweden and Norway, tail docking is banned.

3.6.2 What are the obstacles to implement the EU legislation on pig farming?

The Network representative from Belgium (Region Wallonia) presented a series of activities that are in place in the EU and in Belgium on the protection of pigs on farm and on AW in general, such as: legislative acts (e.g., Council Directive 2008/120/EC and Royal Decrees of May 2001 and 2003, and April 2023), recommendations, best practices, private label projects (e.g., “*Beter voor Dieren*” in Flanders), the setting up of the EURCAW-pigs, the publication of EFSA SOs under the framework of the F2F strategy, etc.

It was asked to the meeting participants to reflect on which initiatives should be reinforced to remove or reduce the obstacles to implement the EU legislation on pig farming.

During the plenary discussion, the aspect of farm rentability was discussed. Production increases not only if the farmers are responsible, but many actors are involved and there are differences among MSs. For example, in some MSs, castration would be avoided by farmers, however it is a problem for retailers, abattoirs and the meat sector in general. Genetic companies (breeders) can also have an important role on that by working on a reduction of the boar taint.

3.6.3 Urban animals: how big the problem for coordinate actions?

The representative from Belgium (Region Wallonia) pointed out that high density and interaction of human and nonhuman animals in urban spaces need consideration and implementation of policies to enhance animal welfare in urban regions. Humans share the urban space with companion animals (pets) and ‘wildlife’ animals such as: pigeons, stray animals, cats from colonies etc. Meeting participants were invited to explain what is carried out on this topic in their countries and what initiatives are considered efficient. In particular, the question was asked whether animal welfare should be safeguarded in an urban context, how to do it and what initiatives are considered mostly efficient.

During the plenary discussion, meeting participants agreed on the importance of the topic, and it was reported by some MSs (e.g., Spain and Finland) that initiatives to



enhance cohabitation between humans and urban animals are in place in their countries.

3.6.4 Animals in my life, animals in my heart: how to bring them together?

The representative from Belgium (Region Wallonia) highlighted the ethical and psychological aspects on the human-animal different type of interactions, i.e., in relation to the concept “animals you love, animals you hate and animals you eat”.

It was asked whether debates are undergoing in the different MSs on how society negotiates ethical dilemmas, for instance the meat paradox: a person likes to eat meat, but this conflicts with his morality that killing animals is not good.

During the plenary discussion, some Network representatives agreed on the fact that it is important to consider AW in the light of sociological and psychological challenges.

4. Session scientific NCPs Network

4.1 Ongoing work and reflections on the revision of the EU legislation on the protection of animals at the time of killing

Ester Alaez Pons from DG SANTE G.3 Unit presented the ongoing work on the revision of Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing.

Background and general context were explained: the published EFSA SOs (of 2009, 2019 and 2020), the F2F strategy, the Inception Impact Assessment with options on killing, published in July 2021, the Subgroup of the EU Platform for AW at the time of killing, which is in place from March 2022, and the Impact Assessment Study that will be published. It was specified that for the moment no decisions have been taken on the calendar for the next steps.

Important revision aspects developed on the basis the of latest scientific evidence are the phasing out of carbon dioxide at high concentration for stunning pigs, and of electrical waterbath stunning for poultry, and the definition of requirements for main farmed fish species (salmon, trout, carp, seabass and seabream).

Considering the current limitations in relation to the stunning equipment (few instructions, no proper design, limited local competence), and the insufficient checks and monitoring data at slaughterhouses, additional key options under study are: i) prior stunning with authorised methods, ii) pre-approval of stunning equipment, iii) video surveillance in slaughterhouses, iv) standard operating procedures, v) competence of supervisor, and vi) better collection of data.

Potential amendments of Annex I of Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 will be considered on the basis of the conclusions/recommendations of the ongoing EFSA mandates on the topic (deadline in 2024; see point 5 below), and of the outcomes (expected in 2025) of the project ‘Pigstun’ on non-aversive stunning methods for pigs, as alternatives to CO₂ at high concentration stunning.



During the Questions & Answers session, in relation to a revision of Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009, several Network members highlighted the expectations that MSs have regarding religious slaughter. This is considered an important issue and it was asked if there are any proposals under discussion on that. It was clarified that for the moment religious slaughter has not been included in the options.

Other issues in relation to the current legislation were highlighted by MSs, such as the authorisation process of restraining system, in particular in the case of small-medium enterprises, which in some cases do not use commercial systems and the authorisation is under the responsibility of the Official veterinarian; it was explained that this is one of the issues currently under EC assessment.

In relation to killing of pigs for outbreaks it was asked advice on which method should be preferably used as CO₂ at high concentration, although still allowed, has been demonstrated to be aversive for pigs. For example, in Italy they are studying the possibility of using one single inert gas, instead of a mixture of gases, to reduce the complexity of application under field conditions. The EC representative specified that they are assessing all available options and better answers will be provided based on the outcomes of the 'Pigstun' project.

Finally, information was asked about video surveillance in slaughterhouses and to which extent it is planned to be regulated; it was explained that for the moment there is no proposal adopted it is still under assessment.

4.2 Ongoing EFSA mandates under the framework of Council Regulation (EC) 1099/2009

The ongoing activities of the EFSA AW Team in relation to Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing were presented.

4.2.1 Update on the slaughter and on-farm killing mandates

Chiara Fabris presented an update regarding the two EC mandates on Slaughter of animals and killing for purposes other than human consumption that were received in 2018 and Network members were informed about the timeline for delivering the last three remaining SOs. In particular, the SO on on-farm killing of sheep and goat is scheduled for possible adoption by EFSA AHAW Panel in May 2024, whereas the two SOs on horses (slaughter and on-farm killing) will be produced by the end of the year.

During the Questions & Answers session, it was asked whether EFSA is liaising with EURCAW- Poultry-SFA on the slaughter and killing of poultry. It was specified that EFSA attended the EURCAW-Poultry-SFA network meeting and is in contact with the AW Reference Centres. However, the EFSA SOs on slaughter and on-farm killing of poultry were adopted in 2019 by the EFSA AHAW Panel, and, for the moment there are no further developments on this topic on EFSA roadmap.

4.2.2 Mandate on the use of Diathermic Syncope for stunning cattle

Aikaterini Manakidou presented meticulously the state of play of the ongoing mandate on the use of Diathermic Syncope for stunning cattle (DTS).



Two requests for additional information were made to the applicant and the deadline for delivering the SO was moved to the end of the year.

A description and operation of the apparatus and some key parameters of the new stunning method were provided. It was highlighted that according to the new information received, DTS will be assessed only for simple stunning and can be better compared with the mechanical method of penetrative captive bolt and with the electrical methods.

During the Questions & Answers session, it was clarified that this system is not yet in use, as it is a new stunning method. On the outcomes of the EFSA assessment, EC will decide if the method can be included in Annex 1 of the Council Regulation (EC) 1099/2009. It was explained that cattle are expected to be stunned with one shot with the DTS applicator and the animals after being stunned are rotated to achieve better bleeding.

4.2.3 Mandate on the use of high expansion foam for stunning and killing pigs and poultry

Aikaterini Manakidou made a detailed presentation on the ongoing mandate on the Use of High Expansion Foam for Stunning and Killing Pigs and Poultry.

After requesting additional information and clarifications, EFSA received an updated dossier and replies by the applicant. The description of the modified stunning method Nitrogen Expansion Foam System (NEFS) for killing on-farm pigs and poultry in containers, for situations other than slaughter, was presented and the key parameters were carefully described.

During the Questions & Answers session, it was clarified that high-expansion foam is used as an inert carrier of nitrogen to increase effectiveness and efficiency of nitrogen as an anoxic inert gas. MSs were asked if nitrogen foam is used in their countries as a method for emergency killing in the case of outbreaks and Norway, Sweden, Italy, Czechia, Portugal and Croatia replied that they do not use it.

4.3 Exchange of information session - scientific NCPs Network

In this session, Network representatives proposed topics for exchange of information and plenary discussions in relation to Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing.

4.3.1 How to manage slaughter of pregnant cows according to the age of the calf foetus

The Network representative from Czechia raised the issue of slaughtering pregnant cows from a practical and ethical point of view as well as from the perspective of AW and food quality. In Czechia there are rules on this issue in, but discussions are in place with the farming sector and the interest is to gather information about the situation in the other countries.

Questions were asked to the meeting participants, in relation to their national legal provisions and actions, and to the procedures that are followed in *ante-mortem* and



post-mortem inspections and in the case of death of the calf during slaughtering of the cow.

During the plenary discussion, it was specified that transport of cows in the last 10% of pregnancy is illegal; however, once the cow has been transported at the slaughterhouse it is normally slaughtered also because most of the times it is difficult to understand in *ante-mortem* the stage of the pregnancy. It was also asked if there are MSs that slaughter pregnant cows for providing bovine foetal serum.

Examples of national legislation and procedures were provided; for example, in Germany, there is a national regulation that prohibits the sale of cattle for slaughter in the last trimester of gestation. In Sweden, it is not common to receive such cows at the slaughterhouses, however, if it happens, and these are slaughtered anyhow. The instruction is to leave the foetus in the uterus for at least 15 minutes for hypoxia. This process is not well seen by the slaughterhouse FBOs and most likely they will not accept cows from that farmer again. No bovine foetal serum is produced. In other MSs the foetus is kept inside the uterus for 30 minutes (e.g., in Denmark as a guideline). In Spain, it has been defined a protocol with instructions on how to manage the pregnant animals in the slaughterhouses. If pregnant cows in the last period of gestation are transported to the slaughterhouses the fine is addressed to the farmer (e.g., in Denmark (only if the cow is in the last tenth of gestation) and Czechia), however, in some other MSs (e.g. Portugal) it is addressed according to Council Regulation (EC) 1/2005, to the transporter.

4.3.2 On-farm slaughter: Who does What?

The Network representative from Belgium (Region Wallonia), reported that in the region of Wallonia the FBO sector has been subjected to changes (e.g. several closures of slaughterhouses) that have resulted in increasing the distance between farms and slaughterhouses and the development of on-farm butcheries (from 59 in 2018, to 94 in 2021). On this basis, a research project was carried out in 2020 on on-farm slaughtering opportunities in Wallonia. In preparation for piloting the implementation of on-farm slaughtering, a set of questions were asked to MSs representatives to gather information about the use of on-farm slaughtering in their countries.

During the plenary discussion, a variety of situations was reported. In some MSs they use mobile slaughterhouses with official veterinarians travelling to the farms, but in some countries (e.g., Sweden) these systems are phasing out for logistical issues. In Italy on-farm slaughtering is in use for emergency slaughter with the involvement of an official veterinarian. Czechia has established clear rules for emergency slaughter and on-farm slaughter. Several Network members expressed willingness to provide detailed answers on this topic and it was agreed that EFSA will coordinate the collection of the relevant information.

4.3.3 Approaches to acceptable stun-to-stick intervals

The Network representative from Sweden invited to reflect on the stun to stick interval: this interval should ensure that stunned animals are not at risk to regain consciousness after stunning before becoming irreversibly unconscious and then dead from exsanguination. According to Council Regulation (EC) 1099/2009, the maximum stun to stick/kill interval is one of the key parameters that should be defined by the FBO in the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP).



The maximum acceptable time depends on the duration of unconsciousness and on the stunning method. It was stressed that not all stunning attempts are 100 % successful, not even when using 'irreversible' methods, therefore all methods need the definition of a stun to stick interval in the SOP.

In Sweden the definition of the interval is requested also for free projectile (bullet) stunning, and the stun to stick interval is set, as baseline, at 20 seconds for electrical stunning and 60 seconds for gas and mechanical stunning.

Network members were asked to discuss on how it should be decided on what is acceptable in each SOP and to provide information on what interval is considered acceptable for each stunning method in their countries.

During the plenary discussion, countries discussed current provisions and practices in their countries. For example, in Germany, the special permit to extend the stun-to-stick interval for CO₂ stunning is based on an expert opinion from an external specialist institute. This expert opinion is drawn up individually for each slaughterhouse. In Italy, detailed national guidelines have been defined based on scientific literature and official veterinarians check the compliance to these guidelines. As an example, the stun to stick interval for electrical stunning of pigs is of about 5 seconds. Slaughterhouses in Luxembourg are QS certified and the quality organization has defined guidelines for electrical and captive bolt stunning: stun to stick interval of 4 seconds in the case of electrical stunning of pigs, and of 60 seconds for bovine captive bolt stunning. Official veterinarians at the slaughterhouses perform daily checks on the stun to stick interval with a chronometer.

4.3.4 Killing of chicken embryos in shell in hatcheries

The Network representative from Iceland presented the mechanically killing of egg embryos by maceration, with a focus on the situation in Iceland, where there is a limited number of small-scale hatcheries and some 'home-made' macerators.

It was asked meeting participants to provide information about the situation in their countries.

During the plenary session, it was reported that, in Italy, by law maceration will be banned from the end of 2026. In Spain, a protocol has been defined and hatcheries do not use maceration, but CO₂.

4.3.5 Farmed fish welfare during slaughter: stunning and killing methods

The Network representative from Italy highlighted that Italy is the third largest country for fish production in the EU and presented the results of a study that has been performed with the help of the Official veterinarians in the 64 fish slaughter facilities (for several species of fish) existing in Italy.

The main stunning/killing methods that are used are: thermal shock, electric-waterbath, percussion, asphyxia in air, and electric-dry system. Breathing and coordination of movements are the most common indicators that are assessed in the most representative fish species, although for most of fish species no indicators are considered. In addition, the definition of best practices (both for methods and indicators) is lacking for all species).



Information was asked to MSs representative on what methods are used to stunk/kill fish in their countries, if they have national legislations on the protect the fish at the time of killing that also prescribe specific methods and if consciousness is routinely checked.

During the plenary discussion it was reported that in Norway there is national legislation to protect fish at the time of killing, methods have been prescribed by national laws, and consciousness is routinely checked. In this country, most of the methods have largely become industrialized and the legal stunning methods for fish include non-penetrative captive bolt and electrical stunning, whereas CO₂ has been banned since 2007. It was highlighted that the effectiveness of captive-bolt stunning depends on fish size and head shape, while electrical stunning can affect the quality due to risk of haemorrhages in the filet. In Czechia mainly electrical stunning is used in fish slaughterhouses (for carps or rainbow trouts), whereas in Sweden and Finland several methods are used, i.e., electrical stunning, CO₂ stunning or captive bolt.

4.3.6 Ritual slaughter at Sacrifice Festival

The Italian Network member presented the current situation in Italy: 57 slaughterhouses have been authorised for the Sacrifice festival by the Official veterinarians. From 2023, new requirements have been identified for the pre-evaluation of the premises, including on the characteristics of the facilities and of the knives; in the authorisation should be indicated also the number of animals that could be slaughtered in the specific establishment. The next step will be to register information related to ritual slaughter in the establishments national database.

Questions were asked to gather information about the situation in their countries and share experiences on this topic. Specifically, the need for a specific authorization to slaughter for the Feast of Sacrifice and whether there is a system to record each animal slaughtered without prior stunning, and how many animals are slaughtered during the Feast of sacrifice.

During the plenary discussion, it was noted that the issue is regulated differently in the MSs. In Sweden, Norway and Denmark killing without stunning is prohibited, whereas in Portugal the number of such slaughtering is increasing, and a specific approval procedure must be followed. In Spain there is no special authorization for festivals and there is no registration of the number of animals slaughtered. The main problem in Spain, from the perspective of AW and public health, is the religious slaughtering carried out outside the slaughter plants. In Finland, animals are stunned simultaneously with bleeding, but for religious purposes chicken can be decapitated without prior stunning at slaughterhouses.

5. Closure of the meeting

The next meeting will be held in 2025 (date to be fixed).