

Animal and Plant Health UNIT

## SCIENTIFIC NETWORK ON RISK ASSESSMENT IN ANIMAL HEALTH AND WELFARE

Minutes of the 5<sup>th</sup> meeting of the National Contact Points for scientific support established under Art.20 of Council Regulation (EC) 1099/2009

**Held on 15 October 2020, WEB-conference  
(Agreed on 04 November 2020)**

### Participants

- Network Representatives of the National Contact Points for scientific support under Art. 20, Council Reg. (EC) No 1099/2009 (including EFTA Countries):**

Country	Name
Austria	Katrina Eder
Belgium	Claire Diederich
Croatia	Branka Bukovič Šošić
Cyprus	Elias Pantechis
Czech Republic	Simona Kinclova/ Simona Ninkakova
Denmark	Else Enemark
Estonia	David Arney
Finland	Satu Raussi
France	Sarah Bourgine
Germany	Michael Marahrens
Greece	Katerina Marinou
Ireland	Stephanie Ronan
Italy	Sara Rota Nodari
Latvia	Iveta Kocina
Netherlands	Marien Gerritzen
Poland	Krystyna Pedrakowska-Sarachau
Portugal	Maria Jorge Correia
Romania	Adina Ciurea
Slovenia	Arnej Galjot
Spain	Antonio Velarde
Sweden	Charlotte Berg
Iceland	Kristin Guðlaugsdóttir
Norway	Cecilie Marie Mejell

- Observers**

Peter Jakob (Switzerland)

Virginie Michel (ANSES)

- **European Commission:**

Patrick Caruana (DG SANTE, Unit F2-Animals)

Denis Simonin (DG SANTE, Unit G2- Animal Health and Welfare) (morning session, only)

- **EFSA:**

ALPHA Unit: Chiara Fabris (chair), Yves Van der Stede (vice-chair), Sean Ashe, Denise Candiani, Sara Gisella Omodeo, Nik Kriz, Cristina Rapagnà, Maria Vaeret Veggeland, Gabriele Zancanaro.

*The National Contact Points for scientific support under Art. 20, Council Reg. (EC) No 1099/2009 (SNCPs) group is sharing experiences and information in the scope of Article 20 of Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 and the results of their work shall not be viewed as interpretation of legislation. The fact that European Commission staff participate to the meeting should not be considered as an endorsement of the positions expressed.*

### **1. Welcome and apologies for absence**

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed the participants.

Apologies were received from Bulgaria and Slovakia.

### **2. Adoption of agenda**

The agenda was adopted without changes.

### **3. Agreement of the minutes of the 4th meeting of the Network of National Contact Points for scientific support under Art. 20, Council Reg. (EC) No 1099/2009 held on 14-15 October 2019, Parma.**

The minutes were agreed by written procedure on 05 November 2019 and published on the EFSA website.

### **4. Topics for discussion**

According to the agenda, the meeting was organised in a morning session and an afternoon session.

The morning session was moderated by Yves Van der Stede and was characterised by presentations from EFSA (AHAW Team), the European Reference Center for Animal Welfare – small animals (EURCAW-SA) and the European Commission (Unit F2 – Animals of DG-SANTE).

Chiara Fabris chaired the afternoon session which was focused on the communication and exchange of information among the National Contact Points for scientific support under Art. 20, Council Reg. (EC) No 1099/2009 (SNCPs).

#### **4. 1. Overview on the 2020 activities of EFSA on animal welfare (morning session):**

4.1.1. Mandates from the European Commission (EC) on the i) slaughter of animals and ii) killing of animals for other purposes than slaughter and EFSA's Scientific opinions on Slaughter&Killing of poultry.

Chiara Fabris provided a general description the two EC mandates received by EFSA in late 2018: background, request, target populations, Terms of Reference (ToRs) and adoption timelines. Precisely, the EC requested EFSA to review the scientific publications provided in its previous opinions in the field of animal welfare (AW) at the time of killing (from 2004 to 2017) and other sources to provide a sound scientific basis for future discussions at international level on the welfare of animals in the context of: i. slaughter (mandate 1) and ii. other types of killing i.e. killing for other purposes than slaughter (mandate 2).

EFSA addressed the mandates considering five groups of animal species: poultry, rabbits, pigs, cattle, and 'other species' (e.g. goats, horses, ratites...), for a total production of 10 Scientific opinions (SOs).

Slaughtering has been defined as the killing of animals for human consumption that can take place in a slaughter plant or during on-farm slaughter, from the arrival until the animal is dead, including slaughter without stunning. The welfare of the animals on the farm and during transport was excluded from the assessment. Killing for other purposes than slaughter consists in: large scale killings outside slaughterhouses in case of depopulation for disease control purposes and similar situations (environmental contamination, disaster management, etc.); or killing of unproductive animals that might be practiced on-farm for health, welfare or economic reasons, on a large scale or individually.

Chiara Fabris presented also the two SOs on Slaughter&Killing of poultry that were the first ones adopted by the AHAW Panel (in September 2019) and published on EFSA website in November 2019 (<https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/5849> and <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/5850>). The other SOs were adopted/published one after the other at different timings in 2020; this series of ten SOs will end with the ones on Slaughter&Killing of the 'other species', which are scheduled for adoption in December 2021.

The animal species that were considered in the first two SOs are the ones that pertain to the category of 'poultry' as defined by the OIE. A conceptual model was developed to show the interrelationships between aspects corresponding to the different ToRs (hazards, hazards' origins and specification, welfare consequences, ABMs, preventive measures, corrective measures), and the main results of the assessment were summarised in tables, so-called outcome tables. One outcome table, linking all the mentioned aspects, was produced for each process considered in the assessment to provide an overall outcome; in it all retrieved information was presented concisely. Conclusions and recommendations of the SOs were mainly based on the outcome tables.

For both SOs, Chiara Fabris presented the processes that were taken into consideration (including the stunning/killing methods) and the main results, conclusions and recommendations. Some examples were also commented.

In the Questions&Answers session it was further specified that:

1- Decapitation: it is considered a killing method. In the poultry slaughter SO it is recommended that decapitation should only be applied to kill unconscious birds. Moreover, according to EFSA SO on killing of poultry for other purposes than slaughter, decapitation is a killing (and non-stunning) method that cannot be applied to conscious animals (see section 3.4.4.4 of the SO)

2- Cervical dislocation: in the poultry slaughter SO it is recommended that cervical dislocation should not be used for routine stunning of birds; it should only be applied as back-up method when other suitable back-up methods are not available (see section 3.2.3.3. of the SO). Evidence reported that cervical dislocation by stretching (manual and mechanical) does not always lead to immediate loss of consciousness in all the birds; on this basis, in the SO on killing of poultry for other purposes than slaughter, cervical dislocation is considered a killing (and non-stunning) mechanical method and it is recommended that cervical dislocation by stretching and twisting of the neck should only be applied to kill unconscious birds. In addition, it is specified that cervical dislocation by crushing should not be used under any circumstances.

On this topic, the EC highlighted that cervical dislocation is currently authorised by the EU legislation without prior stunning for poultry up to 5 kg live weight.

In this regard, the SNCP representative from SE reported that in Sweden stricter national legislation requires proper stunning prior to killing by neck dislocation for all poultry weighing more than 250 g, whereas, for feasibility reasons, no stunning is needed as legal requirement with birds < 250 g.

3- Lethal injection: in the EFSA SO it is recommended to be administered strictly following the manufacturer's instructions on dose, route and rate of administration. At the meeting it has been emphasised that the manufacturers of lethal injection fluids usually recommends intravenous injections (IV) as the preferred option for conscious animals; however, this route is often not feasible under field conditions and for large-scale killing, and therefore intraperitoneal injections are performed (also in the case of very small animals or animals that are difficult to be restrained for IV injection).

#### 4.1.2. EFSA's draft Scientific opinions on Slaughter&Killing of pigs

Sara Gisella Omdeo presented the two SOs Slaughter&Killing of pigs. Background, EC requests, and ToRs are the same described above, for the poultry SOs.

The pig slaughter opinion has been adopted by the AHAW Panel in May 2020 and published on EFSA website in June 2020 (<https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/6148>).

The processes listed in the mandate were grouped in three phases: Phase 1 - pre-stunning (consisting in: arrival, unloading of the pigs from the truck, lairage, handling and moving of pigs), Phase 2 - stunning, including restraint and Phase 3 – bleeding; the stunning methods that were included in the SO were presented Examples of outcome tables for some of these processes have been also provided and explained in detail.

Main results, conclusions and recommendations of the SO were extensively reported in the presentation. For example, it was reported that ABMs are used

to assess the welfare consequences, but when the use of ABMs is not feasible and the hazard is present, pigs should be assumed to experience the related welfare consequences and treated consequently. The AHAW Panel recommended that staff should be trained to consider pigs as sentient beings, to have a good understanding of species-specific behavior and to act accordingly during all processes. It was also emphasised that hazards could have a cumulative effect on the welfare consequences and that hazards might persist along processes (e.g. loud noise affects the animal until it is stunned). In addition, even when the hazard is present only during one process, its welfare consequence/s might persist during the successive process/es (e.g. pain due to rough handling at unloading of the pigs can persist until the animals are stunned). On this basis, the Panel recommended that, when a hazard is identified, it should be corrected as soon as possible, and that measures to mitigate the welfare consequences should be put in place.

The SO on welfare of pigs during killing for purposes other than slaughter has been adopted by the AHAW Panel in June 2020 and published in July 2020 (<https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/6195>).

Two kinds of methods can be used in the killing of pigs for purposes other than slaughter: a) the stunning-and-killing methods, which are two-step killing methods where the first step does not lead to death of the animals and a second step is needed; or b) the killing methods only, where the application of the method is sufficient to stun and kill the animals at the same time. Main results, conclusions and recommendations of the SO were duly reported. It was highlighted, for example, that in the context of this opinion, the Panel agreed with the principles of the OIE Terrestrial code regarding unacceptable methods. In addition, the Panel also listed some practices that lead to serious welfare concerns and should be banned (e.g. the use of painful stimuli for handling and moving of the animals) and recommended that the killing of pigs with methods that are highly painful (such as: burying, drowning, suffocating, ventilation shut down with or without additional provision of heat or CO<sub>2</sub>, the addition of unauthorized poisons, pesticides or any other toxic substances to feed, water or injection of chemicals unauthorized for killing pigs) should not be used on welfare grounds.

In the Questions&Answers session it was further specified that:

1- Cumulative effect: More information about the cumulative effect of welfare consequences on animal welfare was requested and whether there is evidence on it.

It has been answered that there are many welfare consequences that can have a cumulative effect. However, it is very difficult to deal with these potential interactions and it is impossible to carry out quantitative assessment on animal welfare when more welfare consequences overlap at the same time. There are no specific indicators or studies for assessing, from a quantitative point of view (magnitude of derived intensity), the risk on animal welfare related to more welfare consequences occurring at the same time.

2- If killing of a pig in the lairage at slaughterhouse is needed, it is suggested to stun it with captive bolt, pith the animal first and bleed it in the lairage area. Under these circumstances, bleeding in the lairage area is commonly done in practice in some MSs.

#### 4.1.3. EFSA's draft Scientific opinions on Slaughter&Killing of cattle

Cristina Rapagnà presented the two SOs on Slaughter&Killing of cattle. Background, EC requests, and ToRs are the same described above for the previous SOs.

The cattle slaughter SO has been adopted by the AHAW Panel in September 2020.

The processes listed in the mandate were grouped in three phases: Phase 1 - pre-stunning, which consists in: arrival, unloading of the animals from the truck, lairage, handling and moving to the stunning (or sticking) area, Phase 2 - stunning, including restraint and Phase 3 – bleeding (including the bleeding of cattle following stunning and the bleeding during slaughter without stunning, including restraint). The stunning methods that were included in the SO were grouped in two categories: 1) mechanical (penetrative captive bolt, non-penetrative captive bolt, firearms), and 2) electrical (head-only and head to body). Examples of outcome tables for some of these processes have been provided and explained in detail. Additionally, in response to ToR-4, the following types of animals or species were included in the assessment: unweaned calves, lactating cows, pregnant cows, breeding bulls, horned animals, bison, buffaloes.

The SO on welfare of cattle during killing for purposes other than slaughter has been in dept-discussed during the September AHAW Panel plenary meeting and has been scheduled for possible adoption in October 2020.

In the context of this SO, it was pointed out that the Panel agreed to include in the assessment the killing of individual or small group of unproductive animals that might be practiced on farm for health, welfare and economic reasons also the animals that are injured or terminally ill. For these animal species all the killing methods are individual and there is no existing method for killing of groups of cattle on farm. The main methods were presented. In response to ToR-4, the following types of animals or species were included in the assessment: pregnant cows, breeding bulls, extensively raised animals, bison, buffaloes.

None of these two SOs was published at the time of this meeting; therefore, the relevant conclusions and recommendations were not presented; however, it was specified they have been organised, as for the previous SOs, in the general and the phase-specific ones.

Some weeks after the meeting, the 'Welfare of cattle at slaughter' SO has been published on the EFSA website: <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/6275>.

#### 4.1.4. Welfare of rabbits: on-farm and at slaughter

Denise Candiani provided a general description the background of the three EFSA SOs on the welfare of rabbits. Precisely, in 2018 the AGRI committee of the European Parliament (EP) requested EFSA to produce two SOs on the welfare of rabbits, one on the on-farm welfare, the second on stunning and killing methods. In parallel, in the same year, the two EC mandates on Slaughter&Killing (described in previous point 1.1) included also rabbits in the request for assessment to EFSA.

From these three mandates, EFSA produced three SOs on the welfare of rabbits which were published in January 2020:

- 1) Health and welfare of rabbits farmed in different production systems (<https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/5944>)
- 2) Stunning methods and slaughter of rabbits for human consumption (<https://efsa.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.2903/j.efsa.2020.5927>)
- 3) Scientific opinion concerning the killing of rabbits for purposes other than slaughter (<https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/5943>)

Successively, Denise Candiani presented in detail the SOs on rabbit on-farm welfare and stunning and slaughter (i.e. SOs n. 1 and 2 here above).

#### SO on health and welfare of rabbits farmed in different production systems

EFSA was requested by the EP to assess the welfare of rabbits farmed in different production systems, including organic production, and to update its 2005 scientific opinion about the health and welfare of rabbits kept for meat production.

The animal categories and housing systems that were included in the assessment were presented in detail. To compare the level of welfare in the different housing systems and rabbit categories, welfare impact scores for 20 welfare consequences identified from the literature were calculated, taking their occurrence, duration and severity into account. The main conclusions and recommendations from this assessment were presented for each animal category that was taken into account.

As mentioned before, the SO on stunning methods and slaughter of rabbits for human consumption aimed at responding to two mandates: 1) one from the European Parliament (EP), requesting EFSA to indicate the most suitable stunning and killing methods for rabbits and define indicators to assess unconsciousness and death of the animals for the stunning and bleeding phases, and 2) the mandate from the EC on slaughter of rabbit with same background, request and ToRs of the SO presented in the previous points of the agenda.

The processes taken into consideration in this SO were presented and included the gas stunning (high carbon dioxide, mixture of carbon dioxide with inert gases). It was specified that the latter method is not allowed in the EU anymore following Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 but may still be practiced elsewhere in the world. In this respect, the Panel recommended more research for gas stunning of rabbits to establish concentration of gasses that causes minimum distress prior to loss of consciousness. To monitor stunning effectiveness as requested by the EP mandate, the opinion suggested the use of indicators for the state of consciousness, to be selected on the basis of their sensitivity, specificity and easiness of use. Similarly, it suggests indicators to confirm animals are dead before dressing. So-called 'flow charts' were produced for each stunning method, to support an indicator-based decision process.

In the Questions&Answers session it was further specified that:

- 1- The SO on farmed rabbits concerns rabbits kept for meat and not the ones kept for fur production.
- 2- In some countries electrical stunning of rabbits is not used at all and rabbits are stunned by using penetrative captive bolt or air at high pressure. In other countries, where rabbits are sold in the market without removing the heads

(e.g. Italy), this is not feasible because the use of captive bolt would affect the commercial quality of the carcasses.

#### 4.1.5. Animal welfare on-farm and during transport – Farm to Fork (F2F) mandates

Denise Candiani also described in detail the welfare mandates under the framework of the F2F strategy: background, request, target populations, ToRs and adoption timelines.

The F2F Strategy foresees a comprehensive evaluation of the current EU animal welfare legislation with the view to its possible revision. In preparation to that, in June 2020 EFSA received five mandates from the EC, requesting a comprehensive and updated assessment of the scientific knowledge related to AW of calves, laying hens, pigs, broilers and terrestrial animals during transport.

Due to the complexity of the mandate on the protection of animals during transport (i.e. six animal categories to be considered, six group of practices to be described and seven specific scenarios to be further assessed), EFSA will address it by delivering two different SOs, one on free moving animals and the second on animals in containers. The six SOs will be produced with different deadlines starting from June 2022 to March 2023.

The mandates are available on the Web:

- [Welfare mandate F2F – Calves](#)
- [Welfare mandate F2F – Laying hens](#)
- [Welfare mandate F2F – Pigs](#)
- [Welfare mandate F2F - Broilers](#)
- [Welfare mandate F2F – Transport - free living animals](#)
- [Welfare mandate F2F – Transport – animals kept in containers](#)

With regard to the transport of spent laying hens, Denise Candiani presented a set of questions, as a request for information from the SNCPs Network members, precisely:

1. What is the percentage of spent hens a) killed on farm and b) slaughtered at the slaughterhouse in your Country?
2. How many slaughterhouses adapted for the slaughtering of spent hens are in activity in your country?
3. What is the range and average distance of the journeys?
4. From the spent hens slaughtered, what is the proportion of them transported outside your country?
5. Is in your country a protocol for the assessment of fitness of transport of spent hens?

In the open discussion several SNCP representatives highlighted the fact that it might be very difficult to collect this info since there are no *ad-hoc* databases on it; the EC representative confirmed that this kind of detail cannot be extracted from TRACES (Trade Control and Expert System) either. In practice, in some countries (e.g. France and Italy) the same slaughterhouses process laying hens and other poultry without distinguishing the diverse animal categories, whereas in other countries (e.g. Spain) some slaughterhouses do

not accept spent hens. In Italy, although official figures are not available, the totality of spent laying hens are transported to the slaughterhouses with short journeys (approximately of 50-100 km of distance), due to the high number of slaughterhouses that process these animals. However, no specific protocols are in place to assess their fitness. EFSA specified that this info could be provided in form of rough estimates and don't need to be official figures, if they are not available. The participants agreed to produce this kind of info in form of estimates/approximate numbers and highlighted that they should be used as such in the assessment. It was also suggested to look for these data into the 'report on fitness for transport' that are produced at the slaughterhouses. Another option would be to consult the National Contact Point Network for Reg. (EC) 1/2005; however, it was pointed out that what should be collected is a 'slaughterhouse perspective' more than the 'transport' one.

The specific request from the EC is in relation to the welfare consequences that spent hens may experience when subjected to the possible hazards occurring during their transport; in this assessment, the above-mentioned info from each country would be very useful. However, any additional info or publication SNCPs consider relevant to address the ToRs is welcomed.

Finally, it was agreed that EFSA will contact the SNCPs Network representatives for gathering the info requested; for the SNCPs that would like to start using the tool, a specific 'SNCPs 1099/2009 group' will be created on Teams to collect the info.

#### **4.2. Update on EURCAW-SA (morning session)**

Antonio Velarde, Head of the Animal Welfare Program of IRTA (ES) and partner of the European Reference Centre for the Welfare of Poultry and other small farmed animals (EURCAW-SA) gave a presentation on the EURCAW-SA (composition, activities, remit etc).

According to Council Regulation (EU) 625/2017, Art. 95, the EC designates the EU Reference Centres for AW (EURCAW). The Centres support the EC and MSs in the application of legislation regarding AW, by providing scientific and technical advice and delivering scientific knowledge, to be easily used in the context of the realization of official controls. The main activities, of the centres regard the following areas: coordinated assistance, AW indicators, methods for the assessment of the levels of AW, methods for improving AW, scientific and technical studies, training courses and disseminating research findings and technical innovations. The centres don't interpret legislation nor perform risk assessment. They don't support stakeholders; it was specified that the 'clients' of the EURCAW are the EC, the MSs Competent Authorities (CAs), the National reference centres and 'supporting bodies' advising the MSs regarding science, training, communication in the domain of AW.

The EURCAW-SA has been designed on the 1st of February 2020 with the aim to support EC and MSs on the welfare on-farm, during transport and at slaughter of poultry, rabbits and fur animals. The partners of the centre are ANSES (FR), IRTA (ES), IZLER (IT) and ANIS (DK). A crucial activity of the centre has been liaising with MSs CAs and their Supporting Bodies in order to retrieve main contact points for working together. The Organisation of the EU network meeting with MS representatives is also an important aspect of the Network building, to know the CAs and their needs, build a network among CAs and define priority of work. By

the end of 2020 the centre will be available to receive scientific and technical questions on AW assessment (e.g. on indicators and methods) by its 'clients'. Examples of the activities on the AW indicators were reported in relation to the assessment of the welfare of broilers on farm (Dir. 98/58/EC and Dir. 2007/43/EC), laying hens in alternative rearing systems (Dir. 98/58/EC and Dir. 1999/74/EC) and of the state of consciousness of broilers and turkeys after waterbath stunning (Council Reg. (EC) 1099/2009). It was specified that the centre gives technical support to the CAs for the assessment of AW in the context of the legislative requirements, by providing recommendations for better assessment methods or scientific and technical expertise when no methods of improvement are available. Finally, several aspects related to the training and dissemination activities of the EURCAW-SA were also described. Antonio Velarde concluded that any request on a specific topic to be implemented and any training material to share from MS CAs is welcome and could be also uploaded on the EURCAW website.

#### **4.3 Update on a survey on remote official controls of animal welfare requirements at the time of slaughter**

Patrick Caruana, Auditor at Unit F2 – Animals of DG SANTE presented an upcoming online survey that the EC will be launching on remote official controls of animal welfare requirement at the time of slaughter.

The limitations in performing on-site inspections and official controls in relation to the Covid-19 situation and its preventive measures were addressed. The use of remote controls (e.g. by using video cameras) potentially increased due to the pandemic preventive measures. The EC aims at gathering information from MS CAs on the use of these remote controls; however, it was highlighted that at present, concerning AW at slaughter, the EC has no national contact points (NCPs) from the CAs, but scientific NCPs only (i.e. this Network). Against this background, it was specified the aim of the online survey that will be launched (deadline: 30 October 2020): to collect information from MSs on the official controls of AW requirements at the slaughterhouses, whether they have put in place a system of remote controls, and to share experiences in the use of those technologies to perform official checks. An additional relevant aspect to consider is how the protection of sensitive data is managed in the case of remote official controls. It was highlighted that the survey will be addressed to MS CAs and that it is foreseen one reply by each MS.

During the Questions & Answers session, it was further specified that through this survey it would be possible to acquire knowledge on possible limitations due to the current pandemic in applying quality standards during official checks on AW at the time of slaughter; however, the survey is still at an early stage, and it is premature to draw any conclusion on this aspect.

#### **4.4. EFSA tools to support the virtual communication among SNCPs (afternoon session)**

Chiara Fabris introduced the topic, by presenting the requests received by two SNCP representatives to have a repository of the questions (and answers) that have been (and will be) formulated by the SNCPs under the framework of this Network. Up to now, this kind of exchange of information has been done by e-mail and a MS representative tried to retrieve all the past Q&As to be collected in a file as Network internal records. However, it was highlighted that collecting info from

e-mails to another file would be very time consuming. In this regard, Gabriele Zancanaro presented the potentialities of 'Teams' in answering this need: if an *ad-hoc* 'SNCPs 1099/2009' group in Teams is created, the questions could be posted and answered in real-time via the chat, where every SNCP representative could have access to. If the NCPs Network members would prefer a file with the list of Q&As, the tool gives the possibility to upload the file in the 'files' repository together with any other document that SNCPs would like to share. The files in Teams are 'living documents' where the members of the group can add information, also simultaneously. It was further specified that the tool gives also the possibility of receiving an alert on updates.

In the open discussion several SNCP representatives welcomed the proposal of using Teams for the Network's internal communication and the possibility of amending/updating the info reported in the document also with real-time comments. It was highlighted that the actual Network is considered by the members a very useful forum for its exchanges of information/Q&As aspect; Teams would be the correct tool for giving access to all the members to the topics for discussion and the relevant files. In addition, for further reference it would be useful to have a repository document where the main outcomes of discussion have been reported. On the contrary, other representatives showed concerns on the officiality of these communications once 'stored' in Teams: the perception is that once the info is posted and made available also for the future, it assumes the shape of a formal answer, more official than a quick answer formulated by e-mail. In this sense members could feel uncomfortable in using Teams. In this regard, EFSA replied that the aim is not to have a repository of official data. The purpose is to support and facilitate communication and exchange of information within the Network; the 'chat- function' is in fact intended to keep it informal (e.g. messages can be amended and deleted). In the discussion, other tools have been proposed by some SNCPs (e.g. Dropbox), but Gabriele Zancanaro explained that these are not fit for the needs of the Network (e.g. the uploaded files are static, and the system does not send notifications/alerts on updates). Finally, some SNCPs representatives explained that they do not use Teams at work and have concerns related to the time that could be spent in getting familiar to it. Based on this discussion, it was agreed to leave the topic on-hold until next Network meeting; in the meanwhile, EFSA will set-up a 'SNCPs 1099/2009' group in Teams for enhancing informal exchange of information and communication among SNCPs.

#### **4.5. Exchange of information among SNCPs on AW at slaughter: presentation of the topics proposed by MSs' representatives and plenary discussion (afternoon session)**

Several weeks before the meeting took place, SNCPs representatives were asked to propose topics for discussion to present during this session. To focus the discussion on the main issues related to each of the proposed topics, presenters were asked to present each topic following a similar structure (e.g., description of the topic, main concerns, own country situation, etc.). The presenters were also asked to add a list of requests for information to be sent to the other SNCPs representatives some days before the meeting. The questions were intended as support for the participants in the preparation to the meeting and for guiding the open discussion that followed each presentation. It was highlighted that the questions were not intended for collecting official data or gathering info in a formal way, but just to structure the discussion and support the exchange of information.

Each presentation was followed by a Questions & Answers session.

#### 4.5.1. Various types of recording devices for electrical and gas parameters for stunning equipment for all species

Lotta Berg (SNCP representative from SE) presented the requirements on the stun recording devices that are listed in the Annex II (points 4.1, 5.10 and 6.2) of Council Regulation (EC) 1099/2009, looking for comments and experiences from other MSs. Problems might have been encountered in implementing these requests, mainly in relation to the dry electrical stunners in all species, and waterbath stunners in poultry. For example, concerns have arisen in the case of small-scale slaughterhouses, 'home-built' stunning equipment, or old equipped plants.

Request for information from the SNCPs Network members:

- Would the presence of retrofitted equipment be acceptable, or should it be necessary to buy new equipment?
- Would secondary recording by video or manual recording be considered compliant?

The problem of the recording devices is shared by other SNCPs representatives. This is an issue mainly for small abattoirs that are reluctant to buy these devices as this is a big investment. However, efforts to update the systems should be done and pushed. Manual recording is not considered compliant.

#### 4.5.2. The use of decapitation as a bleeding method in poultry slaughter

Lotta Berg also reported the requirement stated at point 3.2 of Annex III of Council Reg. (EC) 1099/2009, on the fact that, *in case of simple stunning or slaughter in accordance with Art. 4(4), the two carotid arteries or the vessels from which they arise shall be systematically severed*. It was highlighted that, in poultry, the distinction between two-sided cutting of the neck arteries and complete decapitation (where the head is separated from the body of the bird) is thin. It was also reported that some Food Safety Authorities accept the separation of the head in the case of poultry (not for other species); the use of decapitation would decrease the risk of incomplete cutting and it would be easier for the staff to control proper cutting and correct bleeding.

Request for information from the SNCPs Network members: on this basis, would other MSs accept 'severe neck cutting', in practice decapitation, at commercial slaughter?

Network representatives reported that decapitation is not practiced in their countries. Some members recognised the positive aspects in terms of animal welfare that this method could have in the slaughter process of poultry. It was remarked, however, that decapitation should be applied only on unconscious animals; in this sense the difficulty to assess consciousness/unconsciousness in the high-speed line of the waterbath should be taken into consideration. Moreover, in some MSs (e.g. DE, ES and FR) decapitation as bleeding method is not allowed because this practice is considered a carcass processing (as it consists in the separation of a part of the carcass) that, according to Council Reg. (EC) 853/2002, can be applied on dead animals only.

#### 4.5.3. Definition of an animal adult/non-adult. Use of instruments which administer electric shocks for handling.

Sarah Bourgine (SNCP representative from FR) introduced the issue of defining adult pigs, in relation to the use of instruments that administer electric shocks, which is regulated by point 1.9 of Annex III of Council Reg. (EC) 1099/2009. In France a sparing use of electric shocks is tolerated as a last resource mainly to bring individual pigs into the restrainer when it has no floor and it is difficult to use a board to guide the animal in. Finishing pigs were considered adults; however, following a specific request, DG-SANTE clarified that a pig is adult when it reaches its definitive height and weight. Therefore, following this definition, finishing pigs should not be considered adults because they weight 110-130 kg, when an adult pig weights more than 250 kg. On this basis, Sarah Bourgine wanted to know how this specific issue is handled in the other MSs and if the above reported definition of adult pig is shared by all countries.

Request for information from the SNCPs Network members:

- When do you consider an animal to become an adult? Is it when reached the final height/weight? Or is it when reached sexual maturity?
- Do you consider that finishing pigs are adult or non-adult?
- If you consider that finishing pigs are non-adult, do pigs slaughterhouses in your country succeed to respect the interdiction of the use of instruments which administer electric shocks? (the same question can be asked also in the case of bullocks).

There is heterogeneity in the definition of adult pigs across EU MSs: some MSs recognise a pig being an adult when it reaches the sexual maturity (approximately at 8-9 months, however some countries calculate 6 months of age), other MSs when pigs reach the weight of 100-110 kg; in several countries finishing pigs are considered adults. However, it is generally recognised that the use of electric prods has been reduced in the slaughterhouses.

#### 4.5.4. Use of stunning recordings in monitoring procedures and official controls

Sarah Bourgine highlighted the issue related to stunning records required by Annex II of the regulation (see asol point 4.5.1 above) are used for; precisely, the aim is to understand whether the results of these recording requirements are assessed to ensure compliance in the stunning process. It would be interesting to discuss whether and how the FBOs integrate the recordings in the monitoring procedures (or in other procedures) and with which purpose the local CAs control this requirement (e.g. to merely check if the stunning device can record the parameter, to check how the FBOs use the recordings to monitor the stunning process, or to check themselves the recordings to identify non-compliances, etc.).

Request for information from the SNCPs Network members:

- Are national guidelines in place in your country describing how to use records in monitoring procedures?
- In addition to ensuring that the minimum currents are respected, does continuous recording allow other input?

Network representatives reported that there are no national guidelines on the official controls on these recordings. Official Vets control the availability of the recordings and the compliance of the parameters that are used during stunning. In some MSs these checks are not performed routinely, but when there are doubts on the quality of the stunning.

#### 4.5.5. Many restraining equipment in SMEs are artisanal. How can the FBO comply with Art. 8?

Sara Rota Nodari (SNCP representative from IT) reported the legal provisions stated by Council Reg. (EC) 1099/2009 on the restraining, layout, construction and equipment of slaughterhouses (Arts. 8 and 14, respectively), with special emphasis to the obligation of specifying the weight of the animals for which the equipment is intended to be used. Compliance to these requirements is not a problem for plants that slaughter animals of the same size, but it can be an issue in the case of the small-micro enterprises (SMEs) that process animals of different sizes (e.g. pigs from above 10 kg to below 200 kg) depending on the seasonality or following different market demands. It may also happen that they slaughter other species of animals, stunned with different methods (e.g. goats stunned with captive bolt). These SMEs cannot afford the costs of having diverse restrainers for the different weights and kinds of animals that they slaughter, and they use so-called 'multi-species multi-purposes restrainers'. On this basis, Sara Rota Nodari wanted to know if this specific issue exists in the other MSs and, if it is the case, how it is handled.

Request for information from the SNCPs Network members on artisanal restraining equipment:

- Does the FBO prepare instructions for its use?
- How does the FBO comply with Art. 14, in particular how precisely can he declare the categories and weights of animals slaughtered?

This topic seems not to be a common issue in the other MSs. It was reported that FBOs must have written SOPs where their own procedures, instructions of use, and checks if equipment is working properly, must be described; however, this was recognised as a possible problem for SMEs. It was also highlighted that exceptions based on the size of the plants are not foreseen in the case of the requirements listed under Arts. 8 and 14 of the regulation.

#### 4.5.6. Is it time to set minimum A also for electrical stunning of rabbits?

Sara Rota Nodari presented an overview of the data published in the 2017 by the EC on the commercial rabbit farming in the EU: rabbit farming is highly concentrated in three MSs representing 83% of total EU production (ES, FR and IT), whereas ten MSs do not have any commercial slaughtering and farming of rabbits in their countries. For some countries, the number of rabbits reared, and the number slaughtered in their territory do not match. This is explained by the existing intra-EU trade of live rabbits between certain MSs (e.g. NL sends rabbits for slaughtering mainly to BE, and to a lesser extent to DE; SK sends its production to CZ, whilst ES receives live animals from PT). There are around 180 million farmed rabbits reared for meat consumption in the EU; a high proportion of them (34%) are reared, sold and consumed via back-yard farms, direct and local sales. These figures indicate that in the EU, rabbits are in the sixth position regarding the numbers of farmed animals killed for human consumption. Several reports have been published at international level on the protection of rabbits at the time of killing (e.g., recommendations from Amperage vary from 140mA to 400mA); however, there is the need to define precise electrical parameters for electrical stunning of rabbits.

Request for information from the SNCPs Network members:

- Which are the parameter conditions that are currently used in your Country for electrical stunning of rabbits?
- Have you defined precise electrical parameters (minimum current, i.e. mA) for rabbits?
- Which specific signs of unconsciousness do official vets check in rabbits at stunning?

Network representatives showed that different approaches to this issue exist. Few countries (e.g. SE and NO) have a national legislation, requiring a minimum of 0.3A for rabbit electrical stunning. However, it should be noted that in these countries the number of rabbit slaughter plants using electrical stunning is very limited. Other MSs do not have rabbit slaughterhouses at all (e.g. NL and HR), whereas in other MSs (e.g. CY, EE, FR, PT) there is no national legislation and parameters are set based on the results of effective stunning. Gasping has been recognised as a good indicator for that. Sara Rota Nodari commented that operators are concerned about using 0.3 A because it causes meat quality problems (red meat), and tend to use a lower A. Same problems on meat quality and definition of correct stunning parameters to achieve an effective stunning (due to the presence of the fur) were reported also in the case of Spain, where in the past these issues were avoided by commonly using gas-stunning for rabbits (not allowed anymore, according to Council Reg. (EC) 1099/2009). It was agreed that further research on this issue and the setting of a more precise minimum A requirement are needed.

#### 4.5.7. Should we introduce an expiring date for the certificate of competence?

Sara Rota Nodari reported the legal provisions on the level and certificate of competence for personnel carrying out killing and related operations (Art. 7 of Council Reg. (EC) 1099/2009) highlighting that at the moment an expiring date of the certificate of competence is not required. According to Art. 21 of the regulation, in Italy, certificates of competence have been issued following a pyramidal training path: the Ministry of Health and the National Reference Centre for AW trained the Official Veterinarians. Successively, the personnel involved in killing and related operations were trained by the Official Veterinarians. Considering that new scientific evidence has been produced since the adoption and application dates of the regulation, it would be interesting to discuss whether (similarly to what is in place under the framework of Council Reg. (EC) 1/2005) an expiring date for the certificate of competence should be envisaged and the training of these operators should be updated.

##### Request for information from the SNCPs Network members:

- Have your certificates of competence an expiring date?
- Are you in favour of the introduction of an expiring date?
- Are you providing retraining to Official veterinarians and personnel already holding a certificate of competence?

Most of the MSs do not require an expiration date for the certificate of competence (although several representatives would be in favour of having it), except in the case of Romania (where expiration is foreseen after 4 years). Several MSs foresee regular updates on the training of the operators, that is carried out by the FBOs and the Official veterinarians. Concerns have been arisen by some SNCPs representatives on the need of this re-training, considering that the operators are already skilled, and the legislation has not

changed; new training courses should be carried out when the certificate of competence is suspended.

#### 4.5.8. Alternatives to the killing of young males

Claire Diederich (SNCP representative from BE) firstly explained how the topic of AW is regulated in Belgium: in 2015 the topic has been regionalised and three AW Councils are in place, with three different Ministries for AW for each region (Wallonia, Flanders and Brussels). Successively, as President of the Walloon AW Council, Claire Diederich reported some data on the main production systems in Walloon and important concerns that have arisen in her Region in relation to the killing of young males. It was reported that in several production systems (mainly dairy goat, dairy cattle and poultry for egg production) there is a disinterest in male individuals as, by essence, incapable to produce milk/eggs and unable to reach the break-even point in fattening; from an economic point of view, operators consider more profitable to put these animals to death from their first days of life than to grow and fatten them. This issue has an important ethical aspect. It was also specified that the Walloon legislation requires these practices to be carried out by trained and able people, with the most selective, quickest and least painful method for the animal and that only stunned or anesthetized (by vets only) animals can be killed. Lastly, it was also highlighted the importance of developing types of breeding that avoid the killing of these animals.

##### Request for information from the SNCPs Network members:

- What is the estimate, in your Country, of the number of animals affected in the dairy (cattle and goats) and egg production and per production method (e.g. organic, if available) by the killing of young males?
- Which (original) techniques/procedures are in place in your Country to avoid and to prevent the killing of young males in the dairy (cattle and goats) and egg productions?

It was discussed that other countries experience this issue as well; however, the extent may vary and mostly in relation to the day-old chicks. It was reported that in Germany the killing of young male chicks will be forbidden from the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2022; two methods exist to prevent this killing, by assessing the sex of the chicks while inside the eggs. It was suggested that another option is to rear male young chicks for specific 'niche' markets. A ban on long transport of unweaned calves is also expected in the midterm in Germany. In Denmark a specific welfare labelling for male calves is in place to discourage the killing of these animals. The killing of kids and lambs is not an issue in several MSs, e.g. where these animals are sold for typical productions (e.g. ES and IT).

#### 4.5.9. Ritual slaughter – compliance to Art. 4, par. 4 of Council Regulation (EC) 1099/2009

Krystyna Pędrakowska-Sarachau (SNCP representative from PL) presented the Polish situation. Precisely, ritual slaughter (i.e. slaughter without stunning) was banned in Poland in 2013, but in 2014 the Polish Constitutional Court readmitted this practice, declaring that the prohibition of ritual slaughter was inconsistent with the national Constitution. The ban of ritual slaughter has been introduced again in the draft of the AW Law that is currently under the assessment of the Polish Parliament. However, at the moment in Poland the only requirements for ritual slaughter results from Council Reg. (EC)

1099/2009, without national regulations; each slaughterhouse can perform it, and there are no limits of animals slaughtered in such way. Additionally, there are no national data on this slaughter: only the local CAs know which plants perform such slaughter in their territory and how much meat is produced. Moreover, the certification for ritual slaughter is issued by the religious association only, and it is not under the responsibility of the local CAs. Concerns have also arisen in relation to the supervision of the Official veterinarian during the slaughter without stunning process (e.g. lack of assessment of consciousness).

Request for information from the SNCPs Network members:

- Do you have national legislation in place on a total or partial ban of the slaughter without stunning?
- Does the national legislation set limits for slaughter without stunning?
- How the problems of supervision of ritual slaughter are solved in your countries?
- How looks the certification of qualification of slaughter without stunning?
- What are the requirements for certification and who does it certify?

In this regard, the SNCP representative from SE highlighted the need to differentiate between religious slaughter (AKA ritual slaughter) and slaughter without stunning. In Sweden, slaughter without stunning is illegal since 1937. However, religious slaughter is still taking place, with stunning (e.g. Halal, for groups accepting reversible or irreversible stunning), in accordance with the AW legislation. A slaughterhouse can process animals under any ritual they prefer, if the AW legislation is complied with, which means that all animals must be stunned. In Sweden post-cut stunning is not allowed either.

The situation in the EU is very heterogeneous. Denmark and Norway have situations similar to the Swedish one: the ban of slaughter without stunning is in place and religious slaughter with prior stunning is performed. In addition, in Denmark stunning of poultry with parameters different than the ones accepted in Annex I of the regulation is accepted. In some of the countries where ritual slaughter is practiced, a 'mild-stunning' (e.g. with the use of lower electrical parameters) is allowed for this kind of slaughter, to immobilise the animals although they are not properly stunned (e.g. in ES and DE). In other countries (e.g. PT) electro-immobilization is not allowed. Several MSs don't have national legislation on this issue (e.g. IE and IT) however, the plants must be approved by the CAs to carry out non stun slaughter and must comply with a SOP. CAs regularly monitor these slaughter plants and certificates of competence must be held by operators for all parts of the process. By national legislation, in France these slaughter plants should fulfil supplementary requirements to be approved. In Estonia religious slaughter is allowed when followed by post-stun cut, but plants should submit a specific application to the CAs to be authorised. In Belgium the situation is not homogeneous at national level: in Walloon 100% of animal are stunned, reversible stunning methods are applied in the case of religious slaughter, in Flanders post-cut stunning is applied for the ritual slaughter and in Brussels the slaughter of animals without prior stunning is normally performed. In the NL the parameters for stunning are the same for conventional as for religious slaughter. National legislation is in force in the Netherlands for slaughter without stunning: a ban is not in place, slaughterhouses need a special permission for this kind of slaughter, and post-cut stunning is allowed and

mandatory if an animal is still conscious after 40 seconds. In addition, there is a mandatory permanent inspection of the CAs.

Finally, it was highlighted that there is a very recent decision from the EU Court of Justice, saying that MSs cannot ban the slaughter without stunning, as this violates human rights (religious freedom). This will, if it holds through the system, affect all MSs and further discussions will be needed.

On the same topic Sara Rota Nodari pointed out another important issue: the commerce of the meat obtained from the animals slaughtered without previous stunning. She reported the situation in the EU on the limitations to religious slaughter (i.e. some MSs require prior stunning and few ones require post-cut stunning); however, no countries banned the import of meat obtained from religious slaughter. In Italy, there is no specific national legislation on the ritual slaughter (else than the European regulation), several slaughterhouses are authorised to such practice and there is no compulsory labelling for this meat. There is the possibility that (part of) the carcass of animals slaughtered following a religious rite enters the conventional market. It was reported the concern of the Official veterinarians regarding the fact that slaughter without stunning is a derogation that should be applied for religious reasons and not for economical ones.

Request for information from the SNCPs Network members:

- Is all the meat derived from animals slaughtered without stunning destined for the Jewish/Muslim market?
- How is the process to verify that?
- In case you verify an abuse in applying Art.4 par.4 (an animal is slaughtered with ritual slaughter, but the meat doesn't go to the Jewish/Muslim market) what do you do?

This is an important concern shared by many SNCPs representatives. In Germany, where just a couple of plants slaughter without prior stunning, a system of checks is in place to compare the quantity of meat produced by the slaughterhouses for consumers with specific religious requirements and the number of people belonging to the Muslim and Jewish community on the same territory of the slaughterhouses: the number of animals/year should be compliant with the numbers of people in the 'religious community'. It is not allowed to produce more meat than what required by the 'religious community' nor to sell it in the common market. The Official veterinarians carry out assessments on these numbers. In this regard, it was remarked that, in other countries it is difficult to evaluate a limit in the quantity of meat that is produced because part of this meat is destined to be exported to Muslim or Jewish countries. It was specified that in the NL shechita slaughtered meat that is not accepted by the Jewish laws is no longer going into the regular market, but it is accepted and goes into the halal market. In Greece, the parts of the carcasses of animals slaughtered without stunning are treated as animal-by-products; however, doubts on a possible illegal market have arisen.

The concern includes the fact that currently there is no compulsory labelling for the meat obtained from animals slaughtered without prior stunning. In this regard, the EC representative explained that as human rights must be respected concerning the practice of slaughter without stunning, it is a right of the consumers to receive information on how the meat has been produced

(including on stunning of the animals); in this sense the EU Court of Justice will probably express a decision within the next year also about the labelling.

#### 4.5.10. Use of Art. 4.4 (ritual slaughter) with waterbath stunning in poultry

Sarah Bourgine introduced the issue of using parameters below the minimum currents required by Annex I of Council Reg. (EC) 1099/2009, for waterbath stunning of poultry in the case of ritual slaughter. Considering that some religious representatives accept electrical stunning if the method is reversible, in France the use of these parameters is allowed for ritual slaughter. However, this practice needs to be authorised to a derogation from the regulation, as if there was no stunning at all. Thresholds for the prevalence of recovering consciousness have been also set, i.e. 0% prevalence after stunning and 5% during bleeding. If the prevalence is >20%, the authorisation to derogate is suspended.

##### Request for information from the SNCPs Network members:

- If in your country, do you allow use of parameters below the minimum currents for ritual slaughter?
- If yes, have you set thresholds for the prevalence of regaining consciousness after stunning and/or during bleeding?

Network representatives answered that, in several countries (e.g. IT and NL), the use of parameters below the minimum currents required by the regulation is not allowed; in addition, it was remarked that there is no sufficient evidence demonstrating that animals are properly stunned when these parameters are applied. As a general consideration, it was emphasised that, if the religious community accepts the use of waterbath stunning for their ritual slaughter, the method should be applied according to the legislative requirements (without derogation), otherwise no stunning is performed.

## **5. Any Other Business**

Yves Van der Stede (AHAW team leader) communicated that EFSA has recently launched a Call for expression of interest for Scientific and Technical support several areas of assessment including Animal Health and Animal Welfare. The call will be kept open for four years from its publication (end of May 2020) and SNCPs representatives were invited to share this info with their national institutions. It was pointed out that a limitation reported in the call consists in the fact that existing experts from a WG and/or Panel cannot be recruited by the same Unit for which they currently work.

Link to the call: <https://careers.efsa.europa.eu/jobs/notice-of-call-for-expressions-of-interest-scientific-and-technical-support-various-scientific-profiles-214>

## **6. Topics for the next meeting**

A short discussion was held to decide the *modus operandi* for next SNCPs meeting: it was agreed that SNCPs representatives will be asked to propose topics for discussion to present. A list of questions will be produced by the presenters to be sent to the participants in preparation to the meeting and for guiding the open discussion that will follow. It was highlighted once more that the questions are not intended for collecting official data or gathering info in a formal way, but just to

discuss in a structured way and to support the exchange of information among SNCPs.

For the moment there are no urgent topics to include in the agenda; however, it was suggested to have an update on the compliance to Art. 4.4. of the regulation, also based on the decisions of the EU Court of Justice on this issue. Further discussion on possible tools/ways to enhance the communication among SNCPs is also necessary.

## **7. Date for next meeting**

Next meeting will be held in fall 2021. The date will be fixed and communicated in due time.