

## **Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing (England) Regulations 2015 (WATOK)**

**Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs**

**RPC Rating: fit for purpose**

### **Description of the regulation**

The Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing (England) Regulations 2015 (WATOK) implement and enforce Council Regulation (EC) No. 1099/2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing (PATOK) and contain stricter national rules that provide greater protection for animals at the time of killing (maintaining existing domestic requirements). The objectives of WATOK were to:

- ensure there is no overall reduction in existing welfare standards; and
- ensure the UK met the obligations and requirements that PATOK places on Member States.

### **Impacts of WATOK**

WATOK aimed to ensure no reduction in the welfare of animals and that the UK's approach to PATOK was in line with other Member States.

The PIR found that stakeholders agreed that animal welfare has been positively impacted by the introduction of this legislation. Some stakeholders in the industry felt that the introduction of this legislation did not assist in increasing the welfare of the animals, but only increased administrative duties.

The Department states that WATOK has led to animal welfare improvements at the time of killing including:

- Under Article 6 of PATOK, business operators undertaking killing or related operations are required to develop Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for handling and care of animals, restraint, stunning, shackling or hoisting, bleeding and slaughter without stunning, and to implement the SOPs according to their individual situations. This requirement applies to approved slaughterhouses and knackery yards, but not small scale producers based on farms, although it would offer more assurance in their operation for the latter to have SOPs.

- Some operators already had SOPs in place before they were required. For those who had not formalised the process, documenting their processes and making these documents available to the Food Standard Authority's Official Veterinarians (OV) to assess their performance against will have necessitated strategic thinking about operations. Many operators will have taken the opportunity to review their processes to the benefit of animal welfare in the slaughterhouse. Some industry stakeholders expressed concern about regulators being over-reliant on SOP requirements and mandating inessential detail. SOP issues were not one of the main non-compliances found in analysis, making up only 5% of the score 3 non-compliance cases.

Other improvements also included requirements for back-up equipment to be immediately available at the point of stunning (this may be an alternative stunning method) and for both carotid arteries and the vessels from which they arise to be severed during bleeding. Business operators must also ensure that they introduce and implement suitable checking and monitoring procedures to assess the effectiveness of stunning and bleeding as well as other slaughterhouse operations.

As well as requirements and improvements relating to the actual slaughtering of animals, WATOK also made a number of improvements in the slaughterhouses:

- alarms on permanent ventilation systems in lairages;
- breast comforters on live poultry shackle lines;
- birds not to be suspended conscious on the electrical water bath shackle line for any longer than 60 seconds, or 120 seconds for ducks, geese and turkeys; and
- recording of key parameters for electrical stunning, electrical water bath stunning and gas stunning, which must be kept for a year.

### **Quality of submission**

The PIR is now fit for purpose, as a result of the Department's response to the RPC's initial review notice (IRN).

The Department has provided a well laid out and detailed review of the WATOK, including annexes which contain a high level of detail. Some of this detail, particularly Annexes A-D, would be better placed within the main PIR document. The PIR has convincingly supported the decision to retain the regulation and what this may mean for future changes.

The IRN, explained that the RPC noted that the PIR did not adequately recognise or respond to concerns from some stakeholders that the regulations had increased burdens, a point which in the RPC's view would have rendered the PIR not fit for

purpose to support the decision to retain the WATOK. We are pleased that the Department has included additional material in the final PIR to support their case that the regulations are not overly burdensome, although we believe they could have gone further in paragraph 191 in explaining the future work that is likely to be involved in this area.

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| Departmental recommendation | Retain |
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### RPC assessment

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| Is the evidence in the PIR sufficiently robust to support the departmental recommendation? | Yes |
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### Regulatory Policy Committee