Introduction

In its 1985 report on the welfare of farmed deer, the Farm Animal Welfare Council decided that, subject to certain safeguards, the slaughter of farmed deer should be permitted in slaughterhouses licensed for the purpose.

The slaughter of deer in a licensed slaughterhouse in England and Wales is already permitted under Part 1 of the Slaughterhouses Act 1974 by virtue of the definition of animal which excludes only birds and fish. However, provisions in Part II of the Act relating to welfare protection do not apply to deer.

To implement FAWC’s recommendation it will be necessary to make new primary and secondary legislation. This will be done as soon as the legislative timetable permits. In the interim period the general provisions of the Protection of Animals Act 1911 under which it is an offence to cause any captive animal unnecessary suffering apply to deer in abattoirs. In addition the attached Code of welfare practice has been drawn up. This draws heavily on the FAWC’s recommendations for welfare safeguards. Abattoir owners have been asked to follow the guidance in the Code and ministers have requested deer farmers to use only those abattoirs which do so. Both local authorities and the State Veterinary Service (SVS) will be closely monitoring deer slaughter including the implementation and observance of the Code. The experience gained in the use of the Code will be taken into account when legislative requirements are being prepared.

As with all livestock the welfare of deer awaiting and during slaughter depends on the provision of suitable facilities and on sympathetic and competent handling at all stages from unloading to the time of death. In general existing slaughterhouses are not suitable for handling deer without modification and the advice of the local authority and SVS should be sought prior to embarking on deer slaughter. Similarly very few personnel will be experienced in handling deer and it is particularly important that management ensure that all those involved are given suitable training.

The Code should be read in conjunction with the Guidelines for the Transport of Farmed Deer which are also being issued by the Agriculture Departments.

1. This Code relates to the slaughter of all farmed deer in abattoirs.

2. The welfare of deer at the time of slaughter is best safeguarded where the abattoir facilities have been purpose-built or suitably modified and those working with the deer are familiar with the behaviour of deer and competent in their handling. The advice of the SVS and local authority should be sought all cases where it is intended to slaughter deer.

3. Account must be taken of the different behavioural characteristics and range of size of the various species farmed when considering the facilities required and when handling the deer.

4. Only farmed deer, which have become accustomed to being handled, should be taken to an abattoir. Non-farmed deer should not be accepted into an abattoir.

5. The following classes of animals should not be taken to an abattoir:
   - deer of less than 5 months
   - entire males over 24 months, during the rut
   - deer in velvet
• hinds in the last month of pregnancy
• infirm, ill, injured or diseased animals.

6 For the welfare of the animals, only deer which have had their antlers removed should in general be taken to an abattoir. De-antlering should have been carried out on the farm of origin. The removal of antlers in velvet is prohibited by the Welfare of Livestock (Prohibited Operations) Regulations 1982.
Structure of Abattoir Facilities

9. The unloading facility should be such that the exit from the vehicle is enclosed or the effective solid sides of the facility are of an adequate height to prevent any attempt to escape - a minimum height of 2.4 m (approx. 8 feet) is recommended for red deer (unless the exit from the vehicle is enclosed). Open wire fencing should not be used at this point because it may encourage deer to make escape attempts which might result in injury.

10. The walls and doors of passages and lairage pens should be smooth, of adequate height to prevent any escape (approx. 2.4 m (8 ft) for red deer) and to a height of at least 1.2 m (4 ft).

11. Floor surfaces must be constricted and maintained so as to avoid discomfort or injury and in particular must be non-slip and adequately drained.

12. (a) Adequate and suitable lighting should be provided.

   (b) It should be possible at any time to subdue lighting in the lairage.

13. Adequate ventilation should be provided with care being taken to avoid draughts.

14. Adequate facilities for provision of drinking water should be available. Facilities should also be available for providing food and bedding for deer which are, exceptionally, kept in the lairage for long periods or overnight.

15. The use of noisy fittings should be avoided and, where appropriate, fittings should be baffled to reduce noise. Surfaces and fittings should not have sharp edges or projections likely to cause injury.

16. Provision should be made for bullied, ill or injured animals to be separated such that they can still see other deer. Any instances of deer being found to be in pain, distress or suffering at the point of unloading should be reported to the responsible local authority official and the DVO.
Stunning Crate

17. The stunning crate should be suitable for the purpose and in particular should be capable of restraining the deer in such a way that it is unable to injure itself. Only one deer at a time should be placed in the stunning crate.

18. The front of the crate should be such that a diffused light source is provided to which the deer will be attracted. The light should not be directed into the eyes of the deer.
Practices - Unloading and Lairage

19. Calm, confident, competent handling is required at all times during unloading and subsequent handling. Sticks and goads should not be used at any stage.

20. Deer should be unloaded in a quiet orderly manner directly into the reception and lairage pens.

21. For the welfare of the animals, two handlers should be present.

22. To facilitate handling personal shields should be used as a visual barrier to deter deer from breaking back.

23. Deer reluctant to unload should be given time to become familiar with their new surroundings. As deer move more readily from dark to light the lairage should be lit at this stage but in such a way that deer are not faced with a direct light source.

24. Deer held in lairage pens should have sufficient space to stand up, lie down and turn around easily. No more than 20 deer should be kept in each reception or lairage pen.

25. Deer should be laired in familiar groups. Fractious animals and deer over 2 years of age with antlers should be individually penned (note paragraph 6).

26. Sexes should be segregated where the deer are sexually mature and the males have not been castrated. Red deer reach sexual maturity at about 16 months of age.

27. Subsequent to unloading the deer should be allowed sufficient time to settle before being handled further. If necessary the lights should be dimmed. If deer are suffering from heat stress they may benefit from spraying with water.

28. After settling, deer should be slaughtered in the shortest possible time. In general, they should not be left in the lairage for more than 3 hours. They should not be kept overnight except in an emergency in which case they should not be penned in close confinement since fighting can occur when they are left undisturbed.

29. Deer should be securely penned and no opportunity given for escape from the passages.

30. At all times while awaiting slaughter deer should have access to a plentiful supply of fresh clean drinking water.

31. Where deer are exceptionally kept overnight or for long periods in the lairage suitable and sufficient bedding and food should be provided.

32. The lairage should be kept clean. No blood or other refuse from a slaughterhall should be deposited in or allowed to flow into the lairage.
Practices - Stunning and Sticking

33. Deer which are in pain, distress or suffering must be humanely slaughtered immediately.

34. Deer should not be held in the approach passages or stunning crate prior to stunning.

35. No deer should be placed in the stunning crate until the way is clear for it to be stunned and stuck.

36. Deer should not be placed in the stunning crate until any blood has been removed from the crate by washing.

37. Management and operators should ensure that stunning equipment is properly maintained.

38. The stunning and sticking of deer should be carried out only by a licensed slaughterman who has been trained in the slaughter of deer.

39. Stunning should be by captive bolt or free bullet. Reserve equipment should be readily available.

40. A frontal stunning position should be used for captive bolt pistol stunning. Manual restraint of the head is likely to cause struggling.

41. Once stunned, deer should be stuck immediately.

42. Where a slaughterman is stunning and sticking a batch of deer single handed each animal should be stuck before the next is stunned.

43. The last deer in a batch should not be left in a pen on its own but should be placed in the stunning crate as soon as the way is clear for it to be stunned and stuck.

44. Electrical stimulation treatment must only be carried out on animals which have been both stunned and stuck.

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