



P-04-433 Correspondence from the Petitioner to the Clerking Team, 13.10.15

Comments for the Petitions Committee regarding CCTV in Slaughterhouses

Animal Aid is greatly encouraged by the Deputy Minister's clear commitment to protecting the welfare of animals at the time of slaughter. Her recent statement (*Safeguarding animal welfare at slaughter*, October 8) makes it clear that protecting animals from abuse in slaughterhouses is a priority, both for the Deputy Minister herself, and for the Welsh Government as a whole.

Animal Aid has filmed illegal cruelty in nine out of the ten slaughterhouses that we investigated between 2009 and 2014. This included animals being punched, kicked, slapped, stamped on, and picked up by their fleeces and ears and thrown into stunning pens. We filmed animals being deliberately and illegally beaten; pigs being burned with cigarettes; and the throats of conscious animals being repeatedly hacked at. The abuse was widespread and very serious.

Whilst none of the premises investigated were in Wales, we believe that illegal animal abuse could take place in any slaughterhouse, given the inevitable desensitisation of staff who spend their entire working day killing animals. We believe that independently monitored CCTV in slaughterhouses is a vital tool for protecting animals from illegal cruelty, and we are delighted that the Deputy Minister is determined to implement this important measure.

The Deputy Minister's view on CCTV in slaughterhouses is shared by the Farm Animal Welfare Committee (FAWC), which provides independent advice to the government. In a report published in February 2015, it recommended that '*all approved slaughterhouse operators should install CCTV in all areas where live animals are kept and where animals are stunned and killed*' and that '*CCTV*

footage should be regularly reviewed by an approved independent person'.¹

The installation of CCTV would not be expensive. Earlier this year, Defra Minister George Eustice described the costs involved as '*relatively modest*' and said '*we do not think the cost of the equipment is prohibitive*'.²

However, the introduction of CCTV can protect animals from abuse only if the footage is independently monitored, as recommended above by FAWC. Animal Aid has conducted undercover investigations in two slaughterhouses that already had CCTV, but this did not protect animals from appalling abuse. At Cheale Meats, we filmed animals being burnt in the face with cigarettes for fun; one animal being punched in the head; and others being beaten or goaded (with an electric goad) in the face and anus. Although the slaughterhouse had some CCTV coverage, cameras were not located throughout the slaughterhouse, and none were sited in the stunning and killing areas. We filmed illegal cruelty in these 'blind' areas, but also in areas where there were official cameras. This suggests that the CCTV footage was not being properly monitored by the Food Business Operator (FBO).

At Bowood Yorkshire Lamb slaughterhouse, we placed our camera right beside the FBO's own camera and we filmed sheep being picked up and smashed headfirst into solid structures. They were kicked in the face, and thrown by their fleeces, legs and ears. They were tormented and abused and their throats were hacked at with a blunt knife while they were still fully conscious. The abattoir's CCTV cameras would have recorded this abuse, but the system had clearly failed to protect animals. Either the slaughterhouse operator was not monitoring the footage properly, or he had decided to turn a blind eye to the abuse. If the footage had been independently monitored and robust action taken, the outcome – Bowood going into liquidation and workers and FBO facing prosecution – could have been very different.

It is encouraging that disturbing animal abuse of this kind has not been detected in Welsh slaughterhouses, but it may be down to the fact that Animal Aid has never placed fly-on-the-wall cameras inside Welsh slaughterhouses. (The nine English slaughterhouses where we filmed breaches of welfare laws all claimed to be compliant until our independent footage revealed otherwise.) The Deputy Minister acknowledges in her statement that it is important not to be complacent.

Whilst the results of the Food Standards Agency's (FSA's) inspections of Welsh slaughterhouses appear encouraging, this may not show the whole picture. The FSA's round of 'unannounced' visits was in fact announced via the media and each slaughterhouse knew it would be checked within the coming month. Of course, slaughtermen would have taken care to comply with regulations when being watched by an FSA inspector. If workers knew that all their actions were being recorded, that these could be independently reviewed at any time, and that robust action would follow any breaches, then this would have a powerful effect on compliance.

Properly monitored CCTV is not only vital for animal protection but it could also play a key role in safeguarding the reputation of individual businesses, and of the industry as a whole. In her statement, the Deputy Minister emphasises the role that Welsh abattoirs play in providing jobs in rural communities. When slaughterhouses do not monitor worker compliance properly, these rural businesses can be forced to close.

For example, at A&G Barber in Essex we filmed a worker regularly subjecting animals to sadistic abuse, including using the stunning tongs to send powerful electric shocks through pigs' ears, tails, legs, bodies and snouts. In one case, he inserted the tongs into the open mouth of a pig who was already suffering on the ground and sent a powerful shock through her jaw. Once the footage was made public, the slaughterhouse's main customer in Germany cancelled its contract and, as a result, the slaughterhouse went out of business. Within eight months of revealing the cruelty and law breaking at Bowood Lamb Slaughterhouse (as described above), the company ceased trading and went into administration. It is in the industry's own interests to take every possible precaution to avoid such catastrophic damage.

This crucial monitoring of CCTV footage will need a robust but practical approach. We are not suggesting that all the footage that is captured should be reviewed (which would obviously be impracticable) but that independent parties who have welfare as their priority should be able to request sections of the footage, either at random, or where issues are reported to have arisen. This would enable concerned workers to discreetly suggest that certain sections of footage are reviewed without making an official complaint against a colleague.

Animal Aid has commissioned an independent report that will provide detailed information about the expected costs of independent monitoring and how that essential task could be carried out. The report will outline ways in which the cost could be met, without placing additional strain on the Welsh Government's resources. Possible approaches include:

- Re-allocating funds from the current system (which does not adequately protect animals) to a new system
- Reducing vets' hours (since their presence is not deterring cruelties)
- Passing costs to the consumer
- A levy on the whole industry (including farmers, slaughterhouses and retailers)

The monitoring could be carried out in one of the following ways:

- An independent monitoring agency could be set up in a transparent manner, possibly by FAWC or the FSA. It would comprise a small number of appropriately qualified, independently appointed staff.
- An animal welfare organisation, such as the RSPCA or Compassion in World Farming, could dedicate a small team to operate a monitoring system.
- The FSA or Defra could take responsibility for monitoring footage. FSA vets are already on-site to enforce welfare on behalf of Defra, but they are routinely criticised for failing to detect and act upon welfare breaches (they failed to detect any of the breaches Animal Aid uncovered).

We are greatly encouraged by the Welsh Government's commitment to improving the welfare of animals at the time of slaughter. We hope that both the Government and industry will embrace the installation of CCTV as a vital means of driving up standards, whilst safeguarding both animal welfare and economic interests. We would urge both industry and Government to act now, without delay, to stamp out illegal cruelty that may be taking place undetected in Welsh slaughterhouses and could be exposed to the public at any point. We would be delighted to provide any support that is needed with implementing this crucial step forward.

¹ FAWC, Opinion on CCTV in slaughterhouses, February 2015

(https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/400796/Opinion_on_CCTV_in_slaughterhouses.pdf)

²Adjournment Debate on CCTV in slaughterhouses, February 2015

(<http://www.henrysmith.info/news/henry-smith-mp-adjournment-debate-cctv-slaughterhouses>)