ADVICE TO THE AGRICULTURAL MINISTERS OF GREAT BRITAIN

ON

THE NEED TO CONTROL CERTAIN MUTILATIONS ON FARM ANIMALS
FARM ANIMAL WELFARE COUNCIL

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July 1981
FARM ANIMAL WELFARE COUNCIL

The Farm Animal Welfare Council was set up in July 1979 by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Secretaries of State for Scotland and Wales under the Chairmanship of Professor R J Harrison, MD DSc FRS, Professor of Anatomy at the University of Cambridge. It has been charged with responsibility for keeping under review the welfare of farm animals on agricultural land, at markets, in transit, and at the place of slaughter, and with advising the Ministers on any changes that may be necessary, either in the law or otherwise.

The Council has 23 members, including the Chairman, all of whom have been appointed by Ministers and serve in a personal capacity.

They are:

Chairman: Professor R J Harrison FRS MA MD DSc MRCS LRCP

Members:

Mr C H Armstrong
Mrs M A S Bates BSc (Agric)
Rev A L Birbeck MA
Mr P L Brown BSc MRCVS
Mr S Burgess FBIM
Mr J H Cullimore JP
Professor J M Cunningham CBE BSc (Agric) PhD FRSE FIBiol
Mr R Ewbank MVSc MRCVS FIBiol
Mrs R Harrison
Mr H F C Hebeler FRCVS
Mr R J Hopkins
Mr J A Inverarity
Professor J O L King PhD MVSc BSc (Agric) FRCVS FIBiol
Mrs G Knight
Mr T M Leach MRCVS DVSM
Mr D G Llewellyn BVSc MRCVS
Mr J McCaskie FIA(Scot)(Est)
Mr M Nicholson MA Dip Ag(Cantab)
Mr C Platt MIBiol
Dr D W B Sainsbury MA BSc MRCVS
Mr I A Turner
Professor A J F Webster MA VetMB PhD MRCVS
To
The Rt Hon Peter Walker MBE MP
Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

The Rt Hon George Younger TD MP
Secretary of State for Scotland

The Rt Hon Nicholas Edwards MP
Secretary of State for Wales

One of the tasks which the Farm Animal Welfare Council took over from the disbanded Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Committee was consideration of the need to provide farm livestock with greater protection in relation to certain mutilations which stock-keepers are currently permitted to carry out on their animals. The starting point for this consideration was the 1976 Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons' report on the mutilation of animals. In this report the Royal College defined a mutilation as "any procedure carried out with or without instruments which involves interference with the sensitive tissue or bone structure of an animal and is carried out for non-therapeutic reasons".

The Council has considered not only those mutilations which concern farm animals referred to in the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons report but also a number of other procedures which fall within the definition of mutilation chosen by the Royal College.

The Council considers that, on ethical grounds, the mutilation of livestock is undesirable in principle. However, it acknowledges that some mutilations must be accepted when scientific knowledge and practical experience have shown that they are necessary for husbandry reasons or that greater suffering may be caused if they are not carried out. We nevertheless believe that operations which involve mutilation should be subject to all the precautions and restrictions which are necessary to safeguard the welfare of the animals.

These same principles were reflected by the Council's predecessor, the Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Committee, in recommendations which resulted in regulations being made in 1974 under section 2 of the Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1968 which prohibit the tail docking of cattle, the surgical castration of poultry, the de-winging of poultry other than feather clipping, the blinkering of poultry where this involves mutilation and the tail docking of pigs over 7 days old; except where these procedures are
on a similar basis in recommending that the harvesting of antlers in velvet from live deer was an unjustified mutilation and should be prohibited.

I have the honour to submit herewith the Council's advice on the further controls which it considers to be necessary over the mutilation of farm animals.

One point that has particularly occupied the Council is the level of competence among stock-keepers who are called upon to perform, as a matter of routine, a number of procedures which cause pain to animals. Those we have considered in this context are castration, the docking of pigs' tails, and the dehorning or disbudding of calves. For the most part these operations are performed competently by experienced stock-keepers, but we are concerned that this is not always the case.

The Council understands that a certain amount of training in these techniques is available and that there is related certification to craftsman status for the purposes of the Agricultural Wages Scheme. However, the Council notes that such certification is optional and that training in these techniques may form only part of a wider ranging test. The Council is informed that the training currently available leads to certification of proficiency in looking after particular species and not to certificates of proficiency in particular subjects or procedures as such. Training in these subjects or procedures, including the tasks involved in the mutilation of livestock, may, however, form part of a particular course leading to a certificate of proficiency in the husbandry of a particular species but need not necessarily be part of such a course.

The Council considers that there is scope for some expansion of training and certification in procedures which involve the mutilation of farm livestock. It recognises that the provision of specific courses in such matters would have resource implications for the Agricultural Training Board and that any changes in the arrangements for craft certificates would similarly have resource implications for the National Proficiency Tests Council and the Scottish Association of Young Farmers' Clubs. However, the Council believes that further emphasis on training and certification in tasks involving the mutilation of farm animals is essential and therefore recommends that the organisations concerned should be asked to explore how training and certification in the relevant techniques could be given much greater prominence.

I hope that you will be able to accept our advice and I am, of course, at your disposal should you require further explanation of any of our proposals.

Professor R J Harrison FRS
Chairman
FARM ANIMAL WELFARE COUNCIL

ADVICE TO MINISTERS ON THE NEED FOR FURTHER CONTROLS OVER THE MUTILATION OF FARM ANIMALS

PART I

COMMON BRITISH HUSBANDRY PRACTICES REQUIRING FURTHER REGULATION

1 CAstration

1.1 The current law relating to the castration of bulls, boars, rams and goats is contained in:

   (a) Part II of Schedule 3 to the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966, which makes it an offence for an unqualified person to castrate an animal over a specified age (12 months for a bull, 6 months for the other species), and

   (b) Paragraph 6 of Schedule 1 to the Protection of Animals (Anaesthetics) Act 1954, as amended by Section 1(3) of the Protection of Animals (Anaesthetics) Act 1964, which provides (inter alia) that an anaesthetic need not be given to an animal that is to be castrated if it is below the following age — bulls and rams, 3 months; boars and goats, 2 months.

1.2 The Council believes that the ages beyond which the operation has to be performed by a veterinary surgeon are too high and that the castration of any species of farm animal more than two months old by a lay operator can, and often does, cause pain and distress to the animal. It is also believed that, if an animal is mature enough to require the attention of a veterinary surgeon, it is mature enough for an anaesthetic to be essential.

1.3 The Council therefore makes the following recommendations:

   (a) The provisions of Part II of Schedule 3 to the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 should be amended by Order to standardise at two months the age above which only a veterinary surgeon may
(b) the provisions of the Protection of Animals (Anaesthetics) Act 1954 should be further amended to make the use of anaesthetics mandatory whenever these animals are castrated over the age of two months.

2 DEVOICING

Cockerels are occasionally devoiced, particularly in urban areas. This procedure is purely for social convenience, and the Council recommends that it should be prohibited.

3 DESNOODING OF TURKEYS

Turkeys are desnooded to prevent damage from frost bite or fighting. Laymen are permitted to desnood turkey poults under the Veterinary Surgery (Exemptions) Order 1962 (SI 1962 No 2557), but the term “poults” is not defined. The Welfare Code for turkeys advises that desnooding should be done as soon as possible after hatching and, where the birds are more than 21 days old, that veterinary advice should be sought. The Council recommends that turkeys over 21 days old should not be desnooded except by a veterinary surgeon.

4 REMOVAL OF THE COMBS OF POULTRY (DUBBING)

The comb is removed from large-combed breeds to prevent damage from frost bite or by other birds. The higher temperatures found in intensive systems can result in increased comb growth. The Council believes that dubbing is surgical engineering designed to modify unsuitable species to particular husbandry systems. The Welfare Code for domestic fowls advises that birds over 72 hours old should be dubbed only on veterinary advice and by a skilled operator. The Council recommends that the operation should be carried out on birds over 72 hours old only by a veterinary surgeon.

5 TOE CUTTING OF DOMESTIC FOWLS AND TURKEYS

The procedure is performed to prevent injury to the hens during mating. The Welfare Codes for domestic fowls and turkeys recommend that it should be performed within the first 72 hours of the bird's life, and that veterinary advice should be sought if the need for toe-cutting arises later. The Council recommends that after the first 72 hours of life the operation should be carried out only by a veterinary surgeon.
6 **VAECTOMY**

Farm animals are sometimes vasectomised in order to create oestrus detection animals. There is no known instance of this having been attempted in the United Kingdom other than by a veterinary surgeon but, to ensure that laymen do not attempt the operation, the Council recommends that vasectomy should be prohibited unless performed by a veterinary surgeon.

7 **REMOVAL OF SUPERNUMERARY TEATS OF CALVES**

Although often performed for cosmetic purposes, this operation can serve a useful purpose in preventing mastitis. The Council recommends that where a calf is over three months old it should be mandatory for the operation to be performed by a veterinary surgeon.

8 **SHORT-TAIL DOCKING OF SHEEP**

The complete tail-docking insisted on by some breed societies deprives a ewe of her natural defence against flies in the sensitive vulval area. Although at least one society has now banned such docking, the Council recommends that a regulation should be introduced to provide that at least four coccygeal vertebrae are retained.

9 **SURGICAL DEHORNING AND DISBUDDING OF SHEEP AND GOATS**

Because of the complexity of the nervous system in the horns of sheep and goats, the Council recommends that the complete dehorning of these species should be performed only by a veterinary surgeon. It is not, however, the intention to recommend the prohibition of trimming the insensitive tips of ingrowing horns which, if left untreated, could cause pain or distress to the animal.

10 **ELECTRO-EJACULATION**

Electro-ejaculation may be used either for the collection of semen from bulls for the purpose of artificial insemination or to obtain semen samples from rams in order to assess the animal’s reproductive capacity. Ejaculation is stimulated by means of an electrically charged diode introduced rectally. Veterinary opinion is divided on whether pain and/or distress may result, and the Council recommends that the procedure be carried out only by a
PART II

PROCEDURES NOT COMMONLY UNDERTAKEN IN GREAT BRITAIN

1 FREEZE DAGGING OF SHEEP

"Dagging" means removing the fleece from a ewe’s vulval area for hygienic reasons, such as the prevention of fly-strike. A cryogenic or freezing substance said to remove fleece more rapidly than conventional shearing has been commercially tested under a MAFF licence granted under section 1(2) of the Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1968. The State Veterinary Service monitored the tests, during which it was found that, as a result of this treatment, many of the ewes were found to be suffering from long-lasting lesions, accompanied by considerable pain and distress, and some were so badly affected that they had to be destroyed. As a result, the MAFF licence was withdrawn. The Council believes that some farmers may be tempted to adapt the technique, using liquid nitrogen or other readily available substances. It therefore recommends that freeze dagging be prohibited.

2 PENIS AMPUTATION AND OTHER PENILE OPERATIONS

A number of penile operations have been developed in the United States and Canada for the purpose of providing oestrus detector bulls. Even under diligent veterinary supervision, these bulls have often suffered painful septic lesions. These penile operations are practised purely for husbandry purposes and are unnecessary since there are adequate alternative oestrus detection methods. Although not known to be practised in Great Britain, there have been recent indications that some of these operations are under active consideration for the near future, and the Council therefore recommends that all such operations be prohibited as soon as possible.

3 TONGUE AMPUTATION IN CALVES

This operation is carried out in some countries allegedly in order to prevent sucking problems. There is no justification for the procedure and, although it is not known to be practised in Great Britain, the Council recommends that it be prohibited now, as a matter of principle.

4 HOT BRANDING OF CATTLE

Hot branding of cattle is not known to be practised in this country, but the Council recommends that this, too, should be prohibited on grounds of principle.