EU NEWS

June 2024

UEVP

Union Européenne des Vétérinaires Praticiens – AISBL
Union of European Veterinary Practitioners – AISBL

This month, several key European institutions have intensified their efforts to combat African swine fever and avian influenza by implementing various measures. These include providing avian influenza vaccine doses, approving co-financing for phytosanitary and veterinary health programs as well as emergency measures, and publishing audit by the Food and Veterinary Office and EFSA opinion with recommended actions to limit the spread of these epidemics.

Additionally, the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission has developed a methodology to detect the presence of over twenty antibiotics in animal feed. These advances are excellent news for our profession, which has made combating antimicrobial resistance in humans and animals a real priority !

In terms of animal welfare, discussions within the EU Council have concluded regarding the proposal for regulation on the welfare and traceability of dogs and cats, and have pursued its work on legislation on the welfare of animals during transport. The European Commission has reaffirmed its commitment to continue working on animal welfare during slaughter and on farming conditions, including the end-cages.

Volker MOSER, UEVP President

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PRIORITY ISSUES

Update on EMA activities

Meeting highlights from the Committee for Veterinary Medicinal Products (CVMP)

The Committee for Medicinal Products for Veterinary Use (CVMP) held a meeting from 18th to 19th June 2024.

The Committee adopted a positive opinion for marketing authorisation for **DIVENCE IBR Marker Live**, a new vaccine intended for the active immunisation of cattle from 10 weeks of age to reduce virus shedding, hyperthermia and clinical signs caused by bovine herpesvirus type 1.

The Committee adopted a positive opinion for a variation requiring assessment for **Rabitec,** a rabies vaccine.

The Committee adopted positive opinions for a grouped variations requiring assessment for **Suvaxyn PRRS MLV**, a porcine respiratory and reproductive syndrome virus vaccine, as well as for **Daxocox**, to add two new dosing tablet.

The Committee adopted positive opinions for variations requiring assessment to implement the outcome of the marketing authorization Holder's signal (MAH) management process to add adverse reactions in the product for **Credelio** and **AdTab**. The Committee adopted a positive opinion for variations requiring assessment to align the product information with version 9.0 of the QRD template for **Neptra.** The Committee also adopted three positive opinions for a variation requiring assessment to ass a new therapeutic indication for the treatment of notoedric mange for **Stronghold.**

The Committee adopted by consensus positive opinions for variations requiring assessment concerning quality-related changes for: **Exzolt, Ingelvac CircoFLEX; Leucofeligen FeLV/RCP, Leucogen, Nobivac LeuFel, MS-H Vaccine (grouped), Panacur AquaSol (grouped), Prevexxion RN, Vaxxitek HVT+IBD, Prevexxion RN+HVT, Prevexxion RN+HVT+IBD and Proteq West Nile, Oncept IL-2, Prevexxion RN, ProteqFlu-Te, ProteqFlu, Purevax RCPCh FeLV, Purevax RC, Vaxxitek HVT+IBD, Purevax RCPCh, Purevax RCP FeLV, Purevax FeLV, Prevexxion RN+HVT, Prevexxion RN+HVT+IBD, Purevax RCP** and **Purevax Rabies**.

The Committee adopted four scientific advice reports concerning three biological products and a pharmaceutical product for dogs and cattle.

The Committee opened a 4-month consultation for a guideline on demonstration of efficacy for veterinary medicinal products containing antimicrobial substances. It provides recommendations for the design and conduct of pre-clinical studies and clinical trials for veterinary medicinal products containing antimicrobial substances.

It also opened a consultation period of 4-month for a guideline on the conduct of efficacy studies for intramammary products for use in cattle. This guideline provides guidance on design, conduct and reporting of pre-clinical studies and clinical trials or veterinary medicinal products for intramammary use in dairy cattle.

The committee adopted a question-and-answer document on product classification to provide stakeholders with general clarifications on whether a veterinary medicinal product (VMP) is classified as a '*non-biological VMP'*, a '*biological VMP other than immunological VMP'*, or an '*immunological VMP'*, as well as reflections on whether a VMP can be considered as a novel therapy product.

Finally, Boudewijn CATRY was elected as vice-chair of the Antimicrobials Working Party for a 3-year mandate.

Latest news on antimicrobial resistance

Publication by the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of a methodology for determining the presence of more than twenty antibiotics in animal feedstuffs

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On 20th June, the Joint Research Centre (JRC) published a technical report determining 24 antibiotics at trace levels in animal feed. The JRC developed 3 methods of analysis for monitoring trace levels of specified antibiotics in animal feed, based on previous methods or literature.

This report is part of the fight against antimicrobial resistance, and more specifically in line with the delegated regulation on the establishment of specific maximum levels of cross-contamination of antimicrobial active substances in non-target feed and methods of analysis for these substances in feed, which was published in April 2024.

Latest news on animal health at EU level

Publication of a Food and Veterinary Office audit on Hungary's lack of action on the avian influenza

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On 3rd June, the European Commission shared an audit by the Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) regarding the lack of action by the Hungarian authorities to address weaknesses in their emergency system for animal health and surveillance of cases of avian influenza.

Hungary is one of the countries most affected by avian influenza in Europe, with 73 outbreaks in wild birds and 464 outbreaks in poultry detected between November 2021 and the start of the audit.

The report presents the audit conclusions on the prevention, control and eradication measures put in place in Hungary, as well as recommendations:

Concerning prevention:

- Weaknesses in the registration of poultry establishments and the insufficient reliability of data were reported, preventing the authorities from having a properly updated information on the poultry establishments;
- The inability of the authorities to reduce poultry density in areas was identified as a problem in the management of epidemics;
- The non-compliances on biosecurity, in particular in daily operational practices, have been estimated to contribute to increasing the risk of introducing the virus into poultry farms and making it challenging to contain and control the spread of the disease;
- The limited scope of the simulation exercises would also have prevented authorities from addressing some weaknesses;
- The delays in the detection of infection in wild birds have had a negative impacts on the early detection of poultry outbreaks;
- Unnecessary delays in the confirmation of outbreaks in domestic poultry through laboratory results have led to delays in implementing control measures.

Concerning control and eradication:

- The shortage of adequately trained staff, the lack of crisis management tools and the unreliability of data in existing databases were deemed to be undermining the effectiveness and efficiency of the actions taken to prevent and control the spread of HPAI;
- The failure of the competent authority to make use of the avian influenza expert group, which prevented the authority of getting expert advice, missed opportunities to improve their response strategy;
- Delays in confirmation of the disease, incomplete epidemiological enquiries, insufficient follow-up of contacts with outbreaks and inadequate screening and surveillance activities in restricted zones were considered to increase the risk of further uncontrolled spread of the infection;
- The authority did not adequately analyse the risk arising from moving birds out of the restricted zones (to reduce the density of the poultry population and help to accelerate the eradication of the disease from those areas), which contributed to spread the disease and make its control more challenging.;
- The delays in depopulating establishments, which were deemed to be persistent, resulted in an extended period keeping live infected animals, potentially shedding the virus.

In terms of **recommendations**, the audit mentions the following points:

- Ensure that all poultry establishments are registered and updated;
- Improve the effectiveness of the biosecurity measures applied by operators of poultry establishments, by evaluating their suitability to mitigate the prevailing risk factors involved in the areas where they are situated according to the local circumstances and practices;
- Ensure the functionality of the contingency plans and the high level of disease awareness and preparedness in the counties;
- Design and implement surveillance for HPAI in wild birds in a way that is appropriate and proportionate to its objectives;
- Take action to minimise the delays in the notification and confirmation of HPAI cases;
- Ensure the availability of resources to perform all the necessary task after the confirmation of the presence of HPAI in a poultry establishment;
- Ensure that lifting of the disease control measures applied in surveillance zones only happens after a representative number of the poultry establishments situated within them have undergone, with favourable results, visits carried out by official veterinarians that provide adequate epidemiological evidence;
- Implement regular verification procedures/audits in order to identify gaps in the implementation of official controls.

Publication of an EFSA report on the improved situation in Europe on outbreaks of avian influenza

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On 4th July, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) published a scientific report providing an overview of highly pathogenic avian influenza virus detections in poultry, captive and wild birds, as well as avian influenza virus detections in mammals and humans, in and outside Europe during the period from March to June.

On a positive note, EFSA observed that the trend already observed in 2023 of a lower number of virus detections continued in 2024. This trend can be explained by various factors:

- Better acquired immunity to the disease for certain wild bird species;
- The absence of any new introductions of the virus;
- The depletion of certain wild bird populations.

However, the report warns against certain migration dynamics with a persistent impact to date: the avian influenza virus is still present internationally, in Asia, North America and most recently Australia.

Thus, EFSA therefore made some recommendations:

- Keep a high level of active surveillance of wild birds;
- Maintain a accurate and comprehensive recording of HPAI-associated mortality events in wild birds;
- Avoid the share of farm equipment and personnel, particularly when farms have the same ownership;
- Reinforce the genetic characterisation of viruses collected from birds also in areas where a high number of infections in mammalian species was identified is recommended to promptly detect possible mammal-to-avian transmission of viruses containing markers of virus adaptation to mammalian species.

The report also highlighted some cases of avian influenza identified in mammals, such as alpaca (in North America), cattle (in North America) and walrus (in Norway). In Europe, mammal species – which are primarily carnivorous or scavenging mammal species (i.e.cat, Eurasian otter, raccoon and red fox) - have continued to be affected in low numbers.

Very irregular cases have also been detected in humans, often due to unprotected exposure to poultry, live poultry markets or contaminated environments. In addition, three recent cases of infection with the virus have involved exposure to presumed or confirmed infected dairy cattle.

For mammals, EFSA recommended intensifying surveillance activities, virological and serological diagnostic activities targeting mammals, and rapid virus detection reports. Humans, for their part, should avoid prolonged unprotected exposure to infected animals, and personnel likely to be exposed should be provided with suitable equipment. Lastly, EFSA advised that professionals exposed to avian influenza should be made aware of the disease, and vaccinated.

Procurement of 665,000 doses of avian influenza vaccine by the European Commission

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On 11th June, the European Health Emergency Response and Preparedness Authority (HERA), on behalf of the participating Member States, signed a 4-year joint procurement framework contract with Seqirus for the supply of 665,000 doses of pre-pandemic avian influenza vaccine. The contract also includes a clause for an additional 40 million doses during the contract period.

This vaccine is intended for people most at risk from the disease, such as those working on poultry farms, as well as veterinary surgeons, and will help prevent the spread of the disease. The contract allows participating countries to order doses of vaccine depending on the disease situation in their country.

Publication of several implementing acts by the European Commission on new outbreaks of African swine fever

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On 5th June, 12th June, 20th June and 28th June, the European Commission published several implementing acts about new outbreaks of African swine fever in Europe.

The regions affected by new protection, surveillance and restriction rules include:

- Czechia in the region of **Liberecký;**
- Poland in the regions of **Mazowieckie, Opolskie, Podkarpackie, Zachodniopomorskie, Lubelskie, Warmińsko-Mazurskie, Wielkopolskie, Kujawsko-Pomorskie and Dolnośląskie**;
- Germany in the states of **Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Hesse**;

- Greece in the regions of **Macedonia and Thrace;**
- Italy in the region of **Campania;**
- Lithuania in the county of **Panevežys;**
- Slovakia in the regions of **Banskobystrický and Nitriansky;**
- Latvia in the county of **Valmieras.**

Note that the county of **Plovdiv** in Bulgaria has been withdrawn from the list of risk areas following an increase in the number of cases of the disease in the country.

Approval of co-financing measures of phytosanitary and veterinary programmes and emergency measures by the EU Council

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On the 24th June, the European agriculture ministers approved the EU co-financing of plant health and veterinary programmes and emergency measures.

In terms of animal health, the EU Council recalled the effectiveness of this type of co-financing, which has made it possible to eradicate many animal diseases. They stressed the importance of maintaining a high level of animal health for human health, food safety and the reduction of antimicrobial treatments.

However, recent reductions in this co-financing had led to additional costs for farmers and authorities, making it more difficult to combat certain diseases. Member States have expressed fears of a worsening of the negative impact on animal and human health, and are concerned about the workload and administrative burden.

In addition, the EU Council warned that the lack of adequate funding could compromise compliance with legal obligations and reduce the uniformity of animal health in the EU.

On this basis, the EU Council invited the European Commission to consider funding for phytosanitary and veterinary programmes, as well as emergency measures, which is proportionate to the resources required, flexible in the face of sudden crises, and which takes account of the increased costs of staff and laboratory analyses.

Finally, it called on the European Commission to improve the management of plant health and veterinary programmes co-financed by the Union, as well as emergency measures, within the framework of the single market programme.

OTHER ISSUES

Latest news on animal welfare at EU level

EU Council adopts its negotiation mandate on the welfare and traceability of dogs and cats

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On 27th June, the EU Council adopted its position on the proposal for legislation on the welfare of cats and dogs and their traceability.

The aim of this legislative proposal is to improve the welfare of dogs and cats, in particular by imposing obligations on breeders, selling establishments, and shelters, fighting illegal trade and improving their traceability. The new rules will also provide better consumer protection and enable harmonisation of the internal market and fair competition.

The EU Council's proposal includes the following additions:

- Animal welfare principles

The EU Council maintained the European Commission's main proposals, such as the prohibition of certain breeding practices, certain mutilations (cropping, tail docking, removal of claws), or the provision of enough water, food and adequate housing as well as the access of an outdoor area.

- Requirements for operators and breeding establishments

The EU ministers adopted the amendments or confirmed the following provisions:

  - All cats and dogs must be **microchipped and registered in a national database** before they are sold or donated;
  - All **databases will be interoperable** with the databases in other EU countries and will be accessible online;
  - Establishments must ensure **visits from veterinarians**;
  - When selling or donating cats or dogs, the person responsible for these animals has to raise awareness about **responsible ownership.**
  - The European Commission proposed that catteries with more than three cats or dogs producing two or more litters per year should be **inspected by veterinarians to obtain authorisation**. Due to the shortage of veterinarians, the EU Council has reduced this requirement to catteries producing more than five litters or keeping more than five cats or dogs, and allows remote approval to lighten the administrative burden.

The text also mentions that anyone who wants to place a cat or a dog on the EU market will have to ensure that it is microchipped for traceability purposes. Member States will have the possibility to maintain or introduce stricter rules.

- Imports from third countries

In line with the European Commission's proposal, imports will be subject to the same or equivalent standards. However, the EU Council mandate distinguishes between the import of cats and dogs **for placing on the EU market** and **non-commercial movements**, in order to prevent fraud and improve the traceability of cats and dogs:

  - **Placing on the EU market:** The cat or dog will have to be registered in an EU database within **5 working days** of entering the EU. In the European Commission's initial proposal, this was 48 hours after arrival at their destination.

- **Non-commercial movements:** The Council is proposing the creation on **pet travellers' database**. This will allow Member States to have an overview of non-commercial imports into the EU and thus be able to detect suspicious movements.

More generally, the text also includes various elements concerning breeding and competition/exhibition requirements:

- Ban for operators to abandon cats or dogs;
- Prohibition on breeding of hybrids (the result of crossbreeding with a wild species).
- Female cats and dogs who have had two caesarean sections will not be used for breeding, to protect their health and welfare.
- Cats and dogs with extreme traits should be excluded from breeding, to prevent passing these traits on to future generations if there is a high risk of detrimental effects on their welfare or on the welfare of their offspring.
- Cats and dogs with extreme conformational traits or mutilations will be excluded from taking part in competitions, shows or exhibitions.
- The scope of the legislation is extended to foster homes.

Afterwards, several non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have expressed their views on the EU Council's position, such as Four paws or Eurogroup for animals. They welcome a number of the EU Council's new provisions, such as the database interoperability, the breeder requirements, the new rules on imports or the banning on the use of animals with exaggerated physical characteristics where there is a detriment to their welfare. Nevertheless, they regret the failure on expanding identification and registration to all dogs and cats including stray animals.

Next steps:

- The European Parliament – which has not yet started working on the text – will need to address the issue as soon as possible in the 2nd half of 2024.

Interinstitutional negotiations (between the European Parliament, the EU Council, and the European Commission) can begin once the European Parliament has also validated its negotiation mandate.

EU Council exchange on the legislative proposal on animal welfare during transport

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On 24th June, European agriculture ministers met to discuss the European Commission's legislative proposal on the welfare of animals during transport.

The ministers stated that they had held two meetings at technical level to examine specific parts of the text. The following parts have not yet been dealt with: limiting on journey times, exporting live animals to third countries, and taking account of weather conditions.

Among the issues discussed, Finland, Bulgaria and Italy deplored the proposed definition of "*long-distance journeys*". On the same subject, Ireland was concerned about a possible reduction in its access to the single market, which often requires long-distance journeys. On the other hand, Luxembourg, Germany and Denmark felt that the proposal lacked ambition regarding long-distance journeys to third countries.

Some countries were also concerned about the economic and administrative burden that certain proposals could represent for companies and authorities, as well as the unfair competition between EU and non-EU operators.

So far, discussions on this proposal have not resulted in any agreement either in the European Parliament or the EU Council. The Hungarian presidency, whose presidency started on 1st July and will last until 31st December, will therefore have to pursue work and negotiations on this dossier, as set out in its work programme.

Minutes of the 15th meeting of the Animal Welfare Platform

On 17th and 18th June, the European Commission organised the 15th meeting of the European Platform on Animal Welfare.

The platform is made up of representatives of the Member States, European and international stakeholders, organisations active in the field of animal welfare, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and the European Commission. Its aim is to promote dialogue on animal welfare issues and develop coordinated actions and commitments.

The agenda for this session included work on the legislative proposal on the welfare and traceability of dogs and cats, as well as the proposal on the welfare of farm animals during transport.

On this occasion, the Belgian Presidency presented the progress of its work on the proposal relating to the welfare and traceability of dogs and cats. In general terms, the Presidency stressed the need to ensure greater transparency for citizens on issues relating to the animal condition.

A number of concerns were raised, including:

- The euthanasia and slaughter of dogs and cats;
- The approval threshold for breeding establishments, official visits and the administrative burden this entails;
- Reducing the requirements for exemptions in Chapter II (foster homes and shelters).

In order to address these issues, a number of amendments to the original text have been suggested, including the following:

- Introducing foster homes for dogs and cats;
- Strengthening the obligation on operators not to abandon dogs and cats;
- Limiting beauty contests and competitions involving mutilation;
- Interoperability between the various databases in different countries to combat the illegal trade.

Regarding the regulation on the welfare of animals during transport, the Belgian Presidency indicated that it had begun work, which will be continued by the Hungarian Presidency.

To conclude this event, the European Commission recalled the initial objectives of the proposal on animal welfare during transport, namely to improve animal welfare, consumer protection, conditions of competition in the single market and better conditions for combating illegal trade.

The Commission also shared the results of its consultations on the two legislative proposals.

- On the welfare of animals during transport, it was mainly citizens who responded, followed by non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The consultation highlighted :
    - The need for better animal protection that balances economic, social and environmental impacts;
    - General support for more rigorous implementation in all areas;
    - Suggestions concerning temperatures, journey times and space allowances.
- On the welfare and traceability of dogs and cats, the following suggestions emerged from the results:
    - Extend identification and registration to all dogs and cats;
    - Operators' obligations extended to all breeding establishments;

- Ban on the sale of dogs and cats in pet shops;
- Ban on dog and cat shows and competitions with extreme characteristics;
- Greater protection for hunting dogs;
- A clear definition of “intensive breeding”.

The next meeting of the Animal Welfare Platform is scheduled for 21st November 2024.

Announcement by the European Commission of the launch of preparatory work on the citizens' initiative end cage

During a press conference on 4th June, the European Commission stated that preparatory work on the citizens' initiative on the end of cages for farm animals was underway, without specifying a timetable at this stage.

The Commission spokesman explained that the various procedures, including impact studies, had lengthened the legislative process, but that it was still on track.

As a reminder, a complaint had been lodged by some thirty organisations - including Eurogroup for Animals - with the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) to force the European Commission to respect its commitments regarding the missing legislation on animal welfare to which it committed itself in 2021. The European Commission had initially planned to publish legislation phasing out the use of cages by the end of 2023.

Publication of a report on appropriate killing conditions for small ruminants

On 26th June, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) published a report on the appropriate conditions for the killing of small ruminants.

This report assessed the consequences of on-farm killing (other than slaughter) on sheep and goats’ welfare in relation to animal-based measures. According to the report, during the different killing methods procedures, animals may be exposed to fear, pain or stress due to handling, restraint, restriction of movement etc.

The entire killing procedure is divided into two phases:

- **Phase 1: Pre-killing**
  - Handling and movement of the animals to the killing site
  - The immobilisation of the animals prior to the application of the killing methods
- **Phase 2: The stunning and killing of the animals**.

The report highlights three categories of killing methods for sheep and goats: (1) mechanical, (2) electrical and (3) lethal injection.

The report concluded with cautions about the hazards identifies during the killing process, such as:

- Some hazards can be present only during moving and handling, but the welfare consequence of these hazards may persist during the killing process until the animal is rendered unconscious (e.g. injuries resulting from inappropriate handling).
- During the on-farm killing process, most of the hazards identified are associated with lack of specific skills and training of the staff, and with poorly designed or constructed facilities.

The report also mentions specific findings concerning handling and moving:

- During this phase animals can slip, fall, trample, try to escape, have skin lesions and wounds, bone fractures and dislocated joint.
- Moving already injures animals can exacerbate their pain.
- Rushing the animals may cause handling stress and injuries.
- The use of painful stimuli for handling and moving of the animals is considered a serious welfare concern.
- The use of trained leader sheep and trained dogs can facilitate the movement of sheep.

In addition, the report details recommendations on the on-farm killing process:

- During application of the killing method, sheep and goats will experience pain and fear if they are ineffectively stunned or if they recover consciousness.
- In two-step killing methods, the delayed application of the second step (killing method) increases the risk of recovery of consciousness before death occurs.
- The report raises a number of concerns about certain specific practices:
  - The application of percussive blow to the head using a hard object such as metal pipes, sticks or a hammer.
  - Application of electric current from the head to the floor to induce cardiac arrest in conscious animals.
  - Electro-immobilisation of conscious animals.
  - Sticking or bleeding of conscious animals.
  - Inflicting injuries and wounds leading to death.
  - Burying, drowning or suffocating.
  - Addition of toxic substances to feed or water.

Finally, EFSA made some key overall recommendations:

- Design, construction and maintenance of the farm and handling facilities should be based on understanding how sheep and goats perceive their environment and meet their welfare requirements.
- All processes of the killing should be carried out by trained and skilled personnel.
- The welfare of sheep and goats should be assessed at each phase of the killing process.
- Ideally, sheep and goats should be killed in their home pens or pastures and carcasses moved for disposal.
- Animals should not be forced to move faster than their normal, unhindered walking pace.
- Painful stimuli, such as electric goads, hitting with a stick, lifting or pulling by wool and skin fold or horns, should not be used.

On the basis of this report, the non-governmental organisation Eurogroup for Animal is calling for the Slaughter Regulations to be updated as a matter of urgency.

This EFSA report, requested by the European Commission, could serve as a reference when drafting the legislative proposal on this subject.

Decision of the European Court of Human Rights on slaughter without stunning upheld

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The European Court of Human Rights has rejected the request to reconsider the Belgium's bans on slaughter without stunning. In other words, the ruling is now final, and that no legal arguments can now be put forward to challenge it.

On 13th February, the European Court of Human Rights had already ruled that Belgium's bans on slaughter without stunning did not constitute a violation of the Convention. Following this, some organisations launched an appeal, calling for a re-examine of the text on the basis that it could constitute a barrier to freedom of religion. However, the Court upheld its earlier ruling.

Other EU Member States, such as Sweden, Slovenia and Denmark, have recently banned slaughter without stunning, although it is still permitted in a number of EU Member States.

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