

Veterinary certificates for emergency or casualty slaughter bovine animals in the Republic of Ireland: are the welfare needs of certified animals adequately protected?

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Abstract

All emergency and casualty bovines in the Republic of Ireland that are deemed to be fit for human consumption must be accompanied to the slaughterhouse by an official veterinary certificate (VC). Cullinane et al (2010) conducted a review of bovine cases consigned under veterinary certification to emergency (ES) and casualty (CS) slaughter in the Republic of Ireland during 2006 to 2008. The current paper further evaluates these results, with emphasis on the period of validity, transport distance and transport conditions, and considers whether the current VC adequately protects welfare. Of 1,255 veterinary certificates, the median time between certification and slaughter was 1 (minimum 0, maximum 452) day, with one-fifth in excess of three days. The median straight-line distance between farm and slaughterhouse was 22 km; 82 and 98% study animals were transported distances of no more than 40 and 100 km, respectively. In 27% of VCs, no slaughterhouse was designated; hence the transport distance was not limited. In 77% of all cases, the disability/injury was related to the locomotor system, including 35% with limb fractures. Veterinary certification of the latter as being fit for transport appears to have been in contravention of animal transport and welfare legislation. The welfare of animals would be improved if each VC included a certified period of validity. In future, veterinary certificates should state clearly a maximum period of validity between certification and slaughter, a maximum distance that the animal should be transported and a minimum level of comfort under which the animal must be transported. Historically, in the Republic of Ireland, there was no suitable non-transport alternative available to cattle producers wanting to salvage an otherwise healthy animal that had suffered an accident or injury resulting in acute pain. An alternative is now available, with the introduction of an on-farm emergency slaughter policy.

Keywords: animal welfare, bovine, certificate, emergency, Ireland, slaughter