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Regulation of the export of live horses and livestock for slaughter

Report¹

Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development

Rapporteur: Mr Frederik WILLEY, United Kingdom, Socialist Group

1. 1957 - 9th Session - Second part



A. 1. Draft Resolution presented by the Committee on Agriculture

The Assembly,

Regretting that, despite efforts made by some Members of the Council of Europe effectively to regulate the export of live horses and livestock intended to be slaughtered for food, this traffic still continues under conditions which call for criticism;

Considering that care of and kindness to animals is acknowledged to be a hall-mark of European civilisation,

Expresses the hope that the Governments and legislatures of all Members of the Council of Europe will forthwith introduce, and pass into law, legislation effectively regulating the export of live horses and livestock intended to be slaughtered for food, and will ensure implementation of such legislation.

B. 2. Explanatory Memorandum by Mr. WILLEY

1.

In November 1956 the Assembly referred to the Committee on Agriculture a Motion for a Recommendation on the prohibition of the export of live horses for slaughter ([Doc. 579](#)).

The transport and slaughter of horses and livestock has evoked a good deal of public attention in the United Kingdom. This led to the creation, in 1953, of a Committee of Enquiry into the slaughter of horses and to subsequent legislation. The Committee's report shows that, although many of the allegations of cruelty were not borne out, there was, nevertheless, room for considerable improvement of the present situation.

More recently, the great increase in live cattle trade between the United Kingdom and the Continent revived public interest in this matter, and allegations of cruelty were made. Consequently, in February 1957, the British Government appointed a Committee " to enquire into the export trade in live cattle from Great Britain to the Continent for slaughter; the considerations affecting the conditions of this trade and steps to avoid unnecessary suffering of the cattle at all stages of their journey; to consider whether slaughter before export would be a desirable and feasible alternative and to make recommendations ". Members of the Committee visited France, Holland and Western Germany.

In its report, the Committee of Enquiry found that allegations of cruelty were somewhat exaggerated. However, it made specific recommendations both to limit the trade and to provide for improved conditions. The Government has already adopted the Exported Cattle Protection Order 1957.

After this report had been published, the United Kingdom Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Heathcote Amory, announced to the House of Commons on 6th June that measures will be taken under the following main heads :

cows heavily in milk should not be exported for slaughter;

lairages at the ports should be divided and the animals supervised by experienced persons;

water troughs and hay racks, fodder and detention pens should be provided;

detention premises should be permanent and covered and should normally be within the dock or airport area or adjacent to it;

cattle should be fed and watered on lengthy rail journeys.

The matter has been further considered by a Working Party of experts set up by the Council of the Western European Union.

The Council approved the Working Party's recommendation that their conclusions should be forwarded to the Governments of the Western European Union for any necessary action.

The Working Party recommended that :

there should be adequate veterinary inspection at United Kingdom ports;

there should be no re-export of British cattle imported for slaughter by member countries;

the journey on the Continent should be as short as possible;

there should be suitable lairages and arrangements for feeding and watering at slaughterhouses;

all British cattle should be slaughtered by electric stunning or by captive bolt pistol.

The Council approved the Working Party's recommendation that their conclusions should be forwarded to the Governments of the Western European Union for any necessary action.

When examining the motion for a Recommendation ([Doc. 579](#)) in February 1957, the Committee decided that its study should cover cattle as well as horses.

Moreover, for various reasons, it considered that the export of live horses and cattle for slaughter should not be prohibited, particularly because horse meat is much appreciated on the Continent for its food value and because this trade is a means of preventing the disappearance of horse breeding, which has been hard hit by the mechanisation of agriculture.

Since the export of meat is unlikely to displace the export of livestock; since, moreover, humanitarian feeling for animals is not confined to the United Kingdom, the Committee thought fit to recommend that Member Governments review the conditions affecting the transit, export and slaughter of live horses and cattle.

This would be particularly opportune in view of the report of the above-mentioned Committee of Enquiry. It would allay public anxiety in some countries, while the harmonisation of legislation in this matter would remove a good deal of the present elements of misunderstanding