

# What is halal slaughter in Australia?

Halal describes what is lawful for Muslims to eat. It gives a range of beverages and foods (including meat) that are acceptable. Halal food laws are based on interpretation of the Quran, the Muslim scripture. Before halal slaughter, the invocation of Allah's name over the animal is required. Halal slaughter in Australia may differ from halal slaughter overseas because of the differing interpretations of the Quran.

The standard for meat production in Australia is that all animals must be effectively stunned (unconscious) prior to slaughter. The most common form of halal slaughter complies with the Australian standard. The only difference between this halal-slaughter method is that it uses a reversible stunning method, while conventional humane slaughter uses an irreversible stunning method. Halal slaughter overseas may not permit stunning of the animal and this is the key difference between halal slaughter in Australia and halal slaughter in some other countries.

However, there are instances where the relevant Australian state or territory meat-inspection authority can approve an abattoir for ritual slaughter without prior stunning - either halal or kosher - for the domestic market. These are effectively exemptions to standard Australian slaughter practice.

**The RSPCA is strongly opposed to all forms of slaughter that do not involve prior stunning of the animal.**

For cattle and sheep, the requirements for religious slaughter without prior stunning are set out in a nationally adopted guideline *Ritual Slaughter for Ovine (Sheep) and Bovine (Cattle)*:

For cattle, this means the animal must remain in an upright position with the head and body restrained. The animal must be stunned with a captive-bolt pistol immediately **after** the throat is cut (known as 'sticking'). Two separate people must perform the sticking and stunning. If there are any problems restraining the animal while attempting to stick it, then it must be stunned immediately.

For religious slaughter of sheep, the guideline requires cutting both the carotid arteries and the jugular veins. This must be confirmed if they are not completely severed, then the animal must be immediately stunned.

Cattle and sheep requirements are different because cattle have an extra blood supply to the brain through the back of the neck. Therefore, cutting cattle's throats results in less rapid loss of consciousness.

All commercial chicken abattoirs in Australia stun the chicken prior to the throat cut, including for halal chicken.

The RSPCA is concerned there are greater risks of animal suffering during religious slaughter without stunning than for conventional slaughter. The number of animals involved is a tiny percentage of all animals killed but, regardless, the method is distressing to the animal due to:

- increased restraint
- injury caused by the slaughter methods
- subsequent bleeding out.

The use of stunning during the slaughter process can remove some, but not all, of these concerns.

The RSPCA definition of humane killing is: 'an animal must be either killed instantly or rendered insensible to pain until death supervenes'. When killing animals for food, this means they must be stunned **before** slaughter so they immediately become unconscious. The RSPCA policy on ritual slaughter is clear: slaughter without prior stunning is inhumane and completely unnecessary. The RSPCA is opposed to inhumane methods of killing and continues to promote this view to governments and the public.

**What you can do to help:** because it is the state/territory meat or food authority that provides some abattoirs with special permission to conduct religious slaughter without prior stunning, the best person to contact is your state/territory Minister for Agriculture. Tell them you are opposed to inhumane methods of killing animals, including the slaughter of animals without prior stunning. You can also tell the Federal Minister for Agriculture how you feel about religious (some halal and all kosher) slaughter practices that don't involve prior stunning of the animal to ensure it is unconscious and insensible to pain before the throat is cut.

For further information, see:

Contact details state/territory agriculture ministers: NSW, NT, QLD, SA, TAS, VIC, WA

Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals: Livestock at Slaughtering Establishments

Australian Standard for the Hygienic Production and Transportation of Meat and Meat Products for Human Consumption

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Farm animals -> Animal management -> What is halal slaughter in Australia?

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