AQIS Notice Number **MEAT 2004 / 03**		**Humane Slaughter of Ratites**
NSFS Ref 29		
		Contact Officer: Carol Sheridan Senior Veterinary Officer
Date of Effect: 23 February 2004	Date of Expiry: Until Further Notice	Meat Program Ph: (02) 6272 5864

Distribution Category	Last Notice this Category	Distribution Category	Last Notice this Category
☑ Central & Regional Office ☑ OIC Inspection Staff Meat Establishments	Meat Notice 99/	☑ Managers, Export Meat Establishments	

IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE (to be completed by the On Plant Supervisor on the AQIS file copy)

Date Received:_____ Date Discussed With Management:_____

Initial Implementation Date:_____ Date Completed:_____

Initials:_____

PURPOSE

To advise industry of humane ratite stunning and slaughter practices to be implemented.

SCOPE

This notice applies to all export registered establishments slaughtering ratites.

BACKGROUND

AQIS Meat Notice 99/17 and the Operational Guidelines for the Welfare of Animals at Abattoirs and Slaughterhouses (1995) provide guidelines on the humane stunning and slaughter of various species but do not specifically address the stunning of ratites.

Consequently there are differences in ratite stunning and slaughter practices across Australia, as observed by AQIS, US and EU auditors over the past 2 years.

While the different practices do not necessarily compromise animal welfare, this notice provides guidelines to ensure that ratite slaughter is consistently done humanely and corresponds to best practice.

RESTRAINT

Ratites are to be humanely and safely restrained in a way that prevents any suffering, stress or injury to the birds and facilitates an effective stun. The restraint used should not delay shackling and bleeding after stunning.

The level of restraint used must reliably enable accurate electrode (eg calliper) placement. In some instances the bird's head may need to be held to facilitate correct placement eg by a second operator holding the beak and gently lowering the bird's head.

STUNNING

Electrical stunning of the head is the primary stunning method to be used for ratites.

To ensure an effective stun, the electrodes must be placed so that the applied current spans the brain. This is commonly done by placing the electrodes (eg callipers) laterally across the head. Dipping of the calliper tips, in water or dilute saline, immediately prior to stunning may improve conductivity.

A trained operator must do the stunning.

If a bird is identified as incompletely stunned, a suitable backup technique eg captive bolt, approved by AQIS, must be immediately used.

Parameters

The following parameters apply for stunning non-hooded birds:

- an electrical current of not less than 500 milliamperes (mAmps), at 50 hertz (Hz) AC,
- for a minimum of 20 seconds.

The stun should not result in any searing or burning of the birds' skin.

*Equipmen*t

To ensure the correct stunning conditions are applied it is necessary to have suitable equipment available including:

- electrical stunning, and backup stunning, equipment,
- an effective visible or audible timing device (eg a light installed within the line of vision of the operator during stunning),
- timer switch and
- an ammeter or multimeter.

Maintenance

It is essential that all equipment is maintained in good working order, including backup stunning equipment. Before each run the stunner should:

- ensure the electrodes are clean,
- check set parameters using the available meter/s and
- ensure the timer is working.

Stunning must not proceed with dirty or faulty equipment.

ASSESSMENT OF STUNNING

The effectiveness of each stun is to be verified before the bird is shackled and raised.

Effective stunning is best judged by the absence of rhythmic breathing. An effective electrical stun initially causes the bird to slump and exhibit a short phase of kicking. In the following 'tonic' phase the bird becomes rigid with legs flexed and the neck may arch. The ensuing 'clonic' phase, characterised by kicking, may not be observed if the electrical stun is applied for the duration specified in this notice (20 seconds).

A return of rhythmic breathing may signal that the bird is recovering from the stun. Presence of the corneal reflex can be used as a secondary guide.

If a bird is identified as being ineffectively stunned it must be immediately restunned using a suitable method eg captive bolt.

STUN-STICK INTERVAL

To minimise the chance of sensibility returning before the bird is slaughtered, the bird must be bled without delay after stunning. The maximum permissible stun-stick interval is 20 seconds.

STICKING

Sticking must be carried out so that it produces an effective bleed-out.

BLEEDING DURATION

The duration of the bleed-out must be sufficient to ensure that the bird is dead before plucking begins.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Company Management

- Ensure that all relevant operators are aware of the requirements of this notice.
- Develop and implement work instructions for the relevant operators in accordance with this notice.

- Amend bird handling statements to include the relevant provisions of this notice.
- Provide suitable restraint and monitoring devices.

On-Plant Veterinarians

- Ensure adoption of the requirements of this notice to maintain EU market access.
- Monitor and document ongoing compliance with this notice through the NPMS.

Area Team Managers

- Verify implementation of this notice during future monthly audits.

CORRECTIVE ACTION

In the event of a non-compliance, company management must implement, monitor and document effective corrective actions taken. Effective preventive measures must also be implemented to prevent recurrence of the non-compliance. Failure to implement corrective action will result in immediate loss of EU and US listings.

Stephen Tidswell
A/g National Manager
Meat Program

REFERENCES

- AQIS Meat Notice 1999/17
- Operational Guidelines for the Welfare of Animals at Abattoirs and Slaughterhouses (1995)
- Australian Standard for Hygienic Production of Ratite (Emu/Ostrich) Meat for Human Consumption. AS 5010:2001. SCARM Report No. 71.
- Wotton, S and Sparrey J, 2002. Stunning and slaughter of ostriches. *Meat Science*, 389-394.
- Lambooij, E, Pieterse, C, Potgieter, CM, Snyman, JD and Notrjé, GL, 1999. Some neural and behavioural aspects of electrical and mechanical stunning in ostriches. *Meat Science*, 339-345.
- Council of the European Union. Council Directive 93/119/EC of 22 December 1993 on the protection of animals at the time of slaughter or killing. *Official Journal L 340, 31/12/1993*, 21-34.