

PART 2: **THE TRUTH BEHIND** **RSPCA SLAUGHTER**



Date:
DECEMBER 2024

Investigation by:
ANIMAL RISING



STATEMENT OF FINDINGS

This report exposes a deeply flawed system that prioritises profit over compassion and highlights the truth behind the RSPCA Assured label.



For 30 years, the RSPCA, the world's oldest and largest animal charity, has used its trusted name to endorse animal products through the RSPCA Assured scheme (formerly Freedom Food). This scheme promotes a false, idyllic image of happy animals living on well-cared-for farms. In reality, the UK's most trusted animal charity is misleading the public and legitimising the industry.

This report is the second in a series and builds on our findings from 37 randomly selected RSPCA Assured farms, which uncovered widespread factory farming and industrial levels of animal cruelty. Part 2 of our investigations focuses on RSPCA Assured slaughterhouses.

Systemic animal cruelty

Across the four slaughterhouses we investigated, experts found systemic animal cruelty. In one slaughterhouse 85% of pigs were stunned incorrectly leaving animals conscious during slaughter, and in another 96% of cows were prodded with an electric goad, a practice banned by the RSPCA, and 46% of cows showed clear signs of panic or escape behaviours. There was also frequent verbal and physical abuse from workers, and animals watching in terror and panic as other animals were killed or stunned in front of them.

Inhumane Slaughter

The scheme not only fails to uphold its own standards but also exposes a harsh truth: no matter how it is framed or regulated, the industrialised process of slaughter inherently prioritises efficiency and profit over the well-being of animals, making cruelty an unavoidable reality.

RSPCA slaughter is no better or 'more humane' than any other slaughter. It's not possible for animals to be treated humanely in a slaughterhouse due to the nature of the process and the conditions under which they operate. It is clear that improving welfare standards within these systems can only go so far.

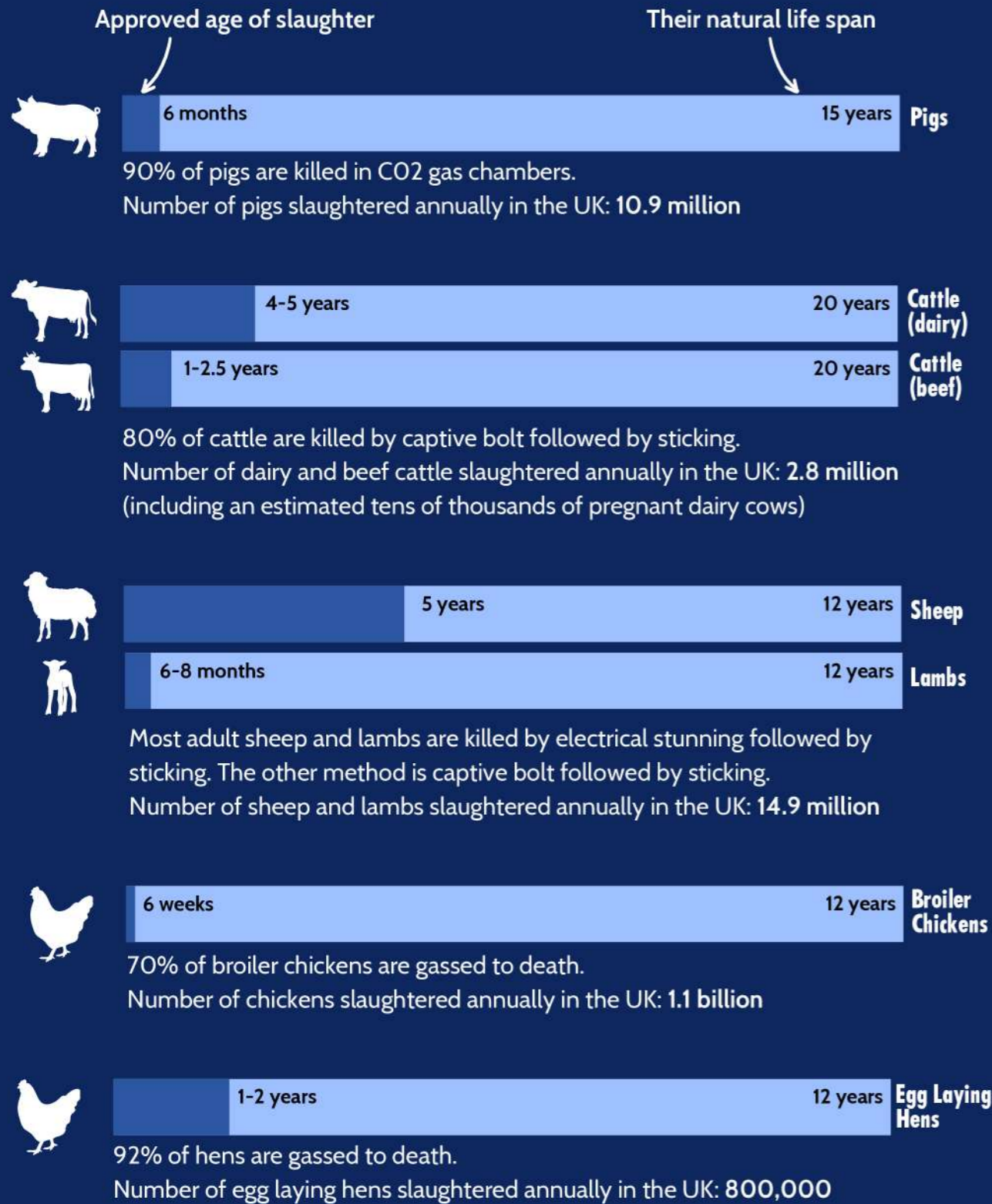
“Animal suffering is animal suffering no matter where it is, but when it's happening in your own backyard- when we should be in a position to guard against it - it hurts more.”
- Chris Packham
President of the RSPCA

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SLAUGHTER AGE VS. NATURAL LIFE



Source: Farm Transparency Project: Age of Animals Slaughtered

Fact: Gas Chambers are the most commonly used method of RSPCA Assured slaughter

Gassing is the most common method of slaughter for most farmed poultry and pigs in the UK.

In the case of pigs, according to the RSPCA standards, "a mixture of gases is used to stun pigs, making them insensible to pain. In RSPCA slaughterhouses, gas concentration must be at least 90%. This is to ensure a faster death and to make sure the animals suffer less."



RSPCA Assured Slaughterhouse gas chamber.
Photo credit: Joey Carbstrong

The facts: As pigs are lowered into chambers filled with deadly concentrations of CO2 gas, they exhibit strong reactions, screaming and thrashing violently in attempts to escape. Exposure to CO2 gas results in oxygen deprivation to the brain and forms an acid that burns the animals' eyes, nostrils, mouth, and lungs, causing a sensation of burning from the inside out. High concentrations of CO2 does not cause instant death. It takes at least two and a half minutes to ensure a pig has no chance of regaining consciousness.

Note: No gas chambers were investigated for this report

SLAUGHTERHOUSES INVESTIGATED



Four randomly selected slaughterhouses across the UK, all certified by the RSPCA under their Assured scheme as being “the gold standard of animal welfare” and that the slaughter process “is always performed in the most humane way possible”.

In England, Scotland, and Wales, the use of CCTV in slaughterhouses is compulsory. While government reports suggest that this initiative has led to improved animal welfare and fewer incidents of non-compliance, our covert investigations across multiple randomly selected slaughterhouses continues to uncover frequent instances of cruelty, violations, and animal distress, showing that these issues remain prevalent regardless of the monitoring systems in place.

These four slaughterhouses kill animals from RSPCA Assured and non-RSPCA Assured farms.

EXPERT REVIEWERS

Animal Rising’s investigation into RSPCA slaughterhouses included securing independent expert reviews of the obtained footage. Analysis of the footage, carried out by leading professionals in animal welfare, veterinary science, and legal compliance, have revealed widespread inhumane practices and significant breaches of welfare standards.



Dr Alick Simmons
Former
UK Government
Deputy Chief
Veterinary Officer

Dr. Alick Simmons has worked as a veterinarian internationally and has served as the UK government’s Deputy Chief Veterinary Officer (2007-2015). Alick has chaired multiple animal welfare organisations and committees, including the British Veterinary Association’s Brexit Working Group. He currently chairs the Zoological Society of London’s Ethics Committee on Animal Research.



Dr Alice Brough
Ex commercial pig
vet with extensive
experience on
RSPCA farms

Dr. Alice Brough is a veterinarian with several years’ experience as an industry vet in commercial pig production. Her clients from 2015 to 2019 spanned every size and system of pig farming and stretched across England and Wales, with hundreds of farms under her care, many of which were RSPCA Assured.



Ayesha Smart
Specialist barrister
in animal welfare
law and Crown
Court judge

Ayesha Smart is a specialist barrister in animal welfare law. They also sit part time as a Crown Court judge in criminal proceedings. Throughout their career they have routinely prosecuted for the RSPCA, local authorities and private organisations in animal welfare proceedings. They also provide expert advice to animal welfare groups, the media and in government consultations.



The full dossier of evidence gathered from the RSPCA Assured slaughterhouses has been submitted to the authorities and is available to anyone who wants further information.

DEFINING THE VIOLATIONS

Being shackled while being stunned

The investigation has found a serious issue with how animals are being handled during slaughter. In theory, electric tongs are used to stun the animal by applying them to their head, and then the tongs are removed before a chain is placed around the animal's back leg to hoist them up.

We found that most, if not all pigs and sheep are being shackled while still being stunned, with the tongs sometimes still on their heads as they are hoisted. **This seems to be done to save time, but it raises a big welfare concern because the animals might still be conscious when this happens.**

Incorrect positioning of tongs

The RSPCA recommends that electric tongs be applied to the animal's head for at least 3 seconds to ensure the stun is effective, with correct positioning of the tongs being crucial.

Our investigations have observed frequent issues with the placement of the tongs, which may have resulted in ineffective stunning. This could be due to workers rushing or not receiving proper training and support. When stunning is not done correctly, animals may remain conscious during processing, leading to significant pain, fear, and distress.

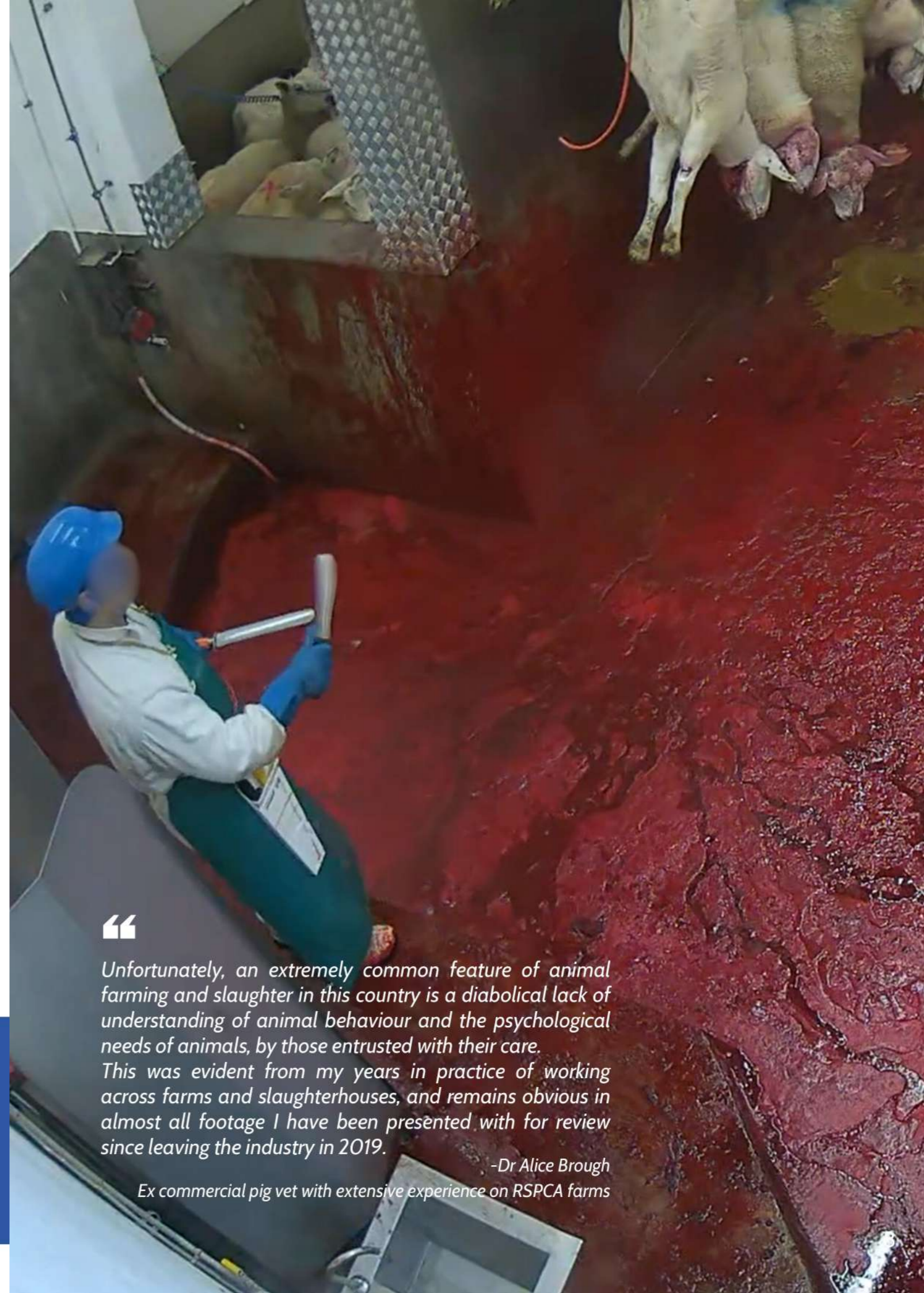
Stun to stick delay

The stun-to-stick interval is the time between when a pig or sheep is stunned and when they are killed. **Since electrical stunning is reversible, animals can regain consciousness within 15-20 seconds.** Regulations require that this interval be less than 15 seconds to ensure the animal remains unconscious at the time of sticking.

However, across our investigation, we frequently observed the process to be poorly managed and slow, with many animals exceeding the 15-second interval posing serious welfare concerns.



Nothing good happens in any slaughterhouses, and, in my opinion, for the 'Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals' to be involved in this on any level leaves them at odds with their objective to protect all animals. - Dr Alice Brough



Unfortunately, an extremely common feature of animal farming and slaughter in this country is a diabolical lack of understanding of animal behaviour and the psychological needs of animals, by those entrusted with their care. This was evident from my years in practice of working across farms and slaughterhouses, and remains obvious in almost all footage I have been presented with for review since leaving the industry in 2019.

-Dr Alice Brough

Ex commercial pig vet with extensive experience on RSPCA farms

SLAUGHTERHOUSE #1

RJ TRAVARTHEN LTD.

Investigation: 01 Oct - 10 Oct 2024

Location: Cornwall

Species slaughtered: Cows, Lambs, Pigs



RJ Travarthen summary

This investigation revealed serious welfare and legal breaches where the treatment of pigs, sheep, and cows fell well below acceptable standards.

Across the board, handling and unloading of these animals was conducted with extreme negligence. Workers routinely used electric prods to strike frightened animals – a practice explicitly prohibited by RSPCA welfare standards. This not only violated basic guidelines but also demonstrated a complete disregard for animal welfare.

Many animals were subjected to unnecessary violence and fear in their final moments, exposing a lack of humane practices and the urgent need for reform in these facilities.

“The workers have a blatant disregard for the welfare of the animals they are due to slaughter and their duties to prevent avoidable pain, suffering, injury or distress.” - Ayesha Smart



100%
PIGS & SHEEP WERE
SHACKLED WHILE BEING
STUNNED

96%
COWS WERE PRODDED WITH
THE ELECTRIC GOAD

46%
COWS SHOWED CLEAR SIGNS
OF ESCAPE/PANIC BEHAVIOUR

82%
PIGS WERE BEING HOISTED
WHILE STILL BEING STUNNED

SLAUGHTERHOUSE #1
R.J. TRAVARTHEN

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE EXPERTS - PIGS

SLAUGHTERHOUSE #1 R.J. TRAVARTHEN LTD.



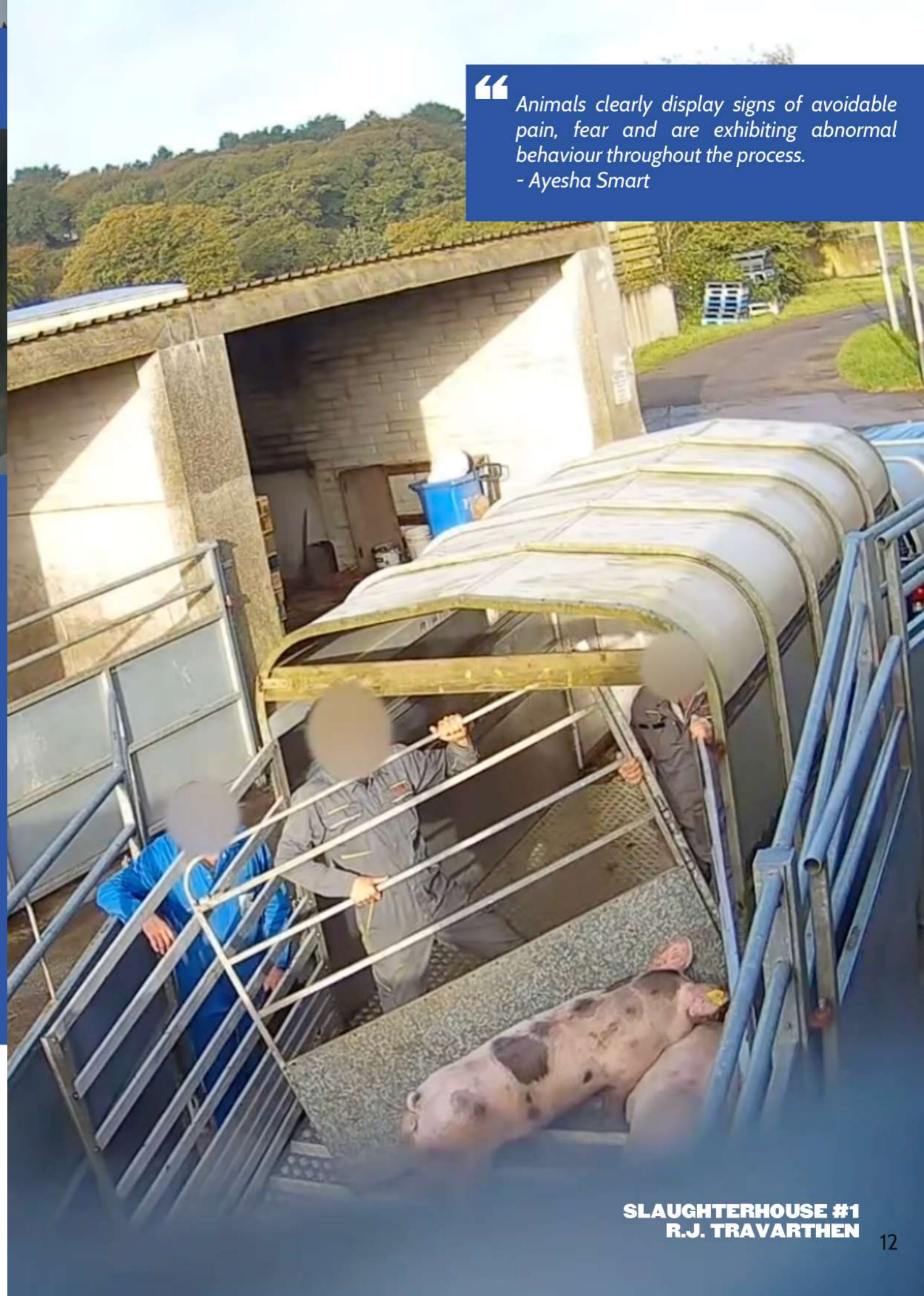
- Unloading was poor. Pigs were handled unsympathetically. Resorting to kicking and shouting is further evidence of poor practice.
- Worker documented hitting and kicking pigs in the face to get them to move off the trailer. Scared pigs try to get back into the trailer, not wanting to enter the slaughterhouse.
- Pigs get pushed into the stun pen often getting hit, including in the face.
- Pigs having to watch each other being stunned.
- Pigs are shackled before electrodes are removed.
- Worker getting angry at a pig for hiding, kicking and shouting ('get out you f*cking c*nt').
- Pigs falling off the shackle line with further pigs bleeding out above them.

LEGAL & WELFARE BREACHES

- ✗ Kicking and hitting pigs (2 breaches: AWA Section 9(2)(e) and Code of Practice 29/33)
- ✗ Handling pigs not in a calm and quiet manner (RSPCA M 3.1 and S 4.1)
- ✗ Rough handling and hitting pigs (3 breaches: AWA Section 9(2)(e), Code of Practice 29/33, RSPCA M 3.1 and S 4.1)
- ✗ Ineffective stunning (Schedule 1 WATOK Paragraph 22)
- ✗ Poor restraining of pigs leading to injuries (1 breach: Schedule 1 WATOK Paragraph 22)

SLAUGHTERHOUSE #1
R.J. TRAVARTHEN

“Animals clearly display signs of avoidable pain, fear and are exhibiting abnormal behaviour throughout the process.”
- Ayesha Smart



SLAUGHTERHOUSE #1
R.J. TRAVARTHEN

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE EXPERTS - SHEEP

SLAUGHTERHOUSE #1 R.J. TRAVARTHEN LTD.



- Sheep reluctant to exit the transport vehicle were hustled aggressively.
- Sheep are scared to enter the slaughterhouse, one is hit round the head and another is pushed into a wall when they try and jump away.
- Sheep are hit in the face, thrown against the wall and roughly grabbed by the wool.
- Terrified sheep watch their companions being stunned, jumping over the unconscious body of a sheep and then pushing themselves into the corner to try and escape the worker.
- Several sheep were hoisted before they were fully stunned, indicating they may have been conscious while being lifted.
- Sheep are subjected to lots of aggressive shouting/swearing, which would likely cause additional fear. Worker angry at the sheep trying to hide, calls them 'f*cking pricks'.

LEGAL & WELFARE BREACHES

- ✗ Rough handling of sheep (3 breaches: AWA Section 9(2)(e), RSPCA M4.3, and M4.4)
- ✗ Failure to handle sheep calmly and quietly (2 breaches: AWA Section 9(2)(e), RSPCA S5.1 and M4.1)
- ✗ Inappropriate use of equipment (grabbing wool and rough handling) (2 breaches: RSPCA M4.3 and M4.4)
- ✗ Inadequate stunning (2 breaches: WATOK Schedule 1, Paragraphs 23 and 27)
- ✗ Improper restraint of sheep before stunning (1 breach: WATOK Schedule 1, Paragraph 18)
- ✗ Dragging stunned or killed sheep over live animals (1 breach: WATOK Schedule 1, Paragraph 10(d))



It is clear from the behaviour of the sheep that they are unduly terrified throughout unloading, movement and stunning (visible panic and escape attempts can be observed).

Animals are stunned in front of each other, not always effectively, and handled roughly without compassion. This is not necessarily a feature unique to this slaughterhouse, more the standard for transport, lairage and slaughter for all farmed animals that I have seen.

- Dr Alice Brough



KEY FINDINGS FROM THE EXPERTS - COWS

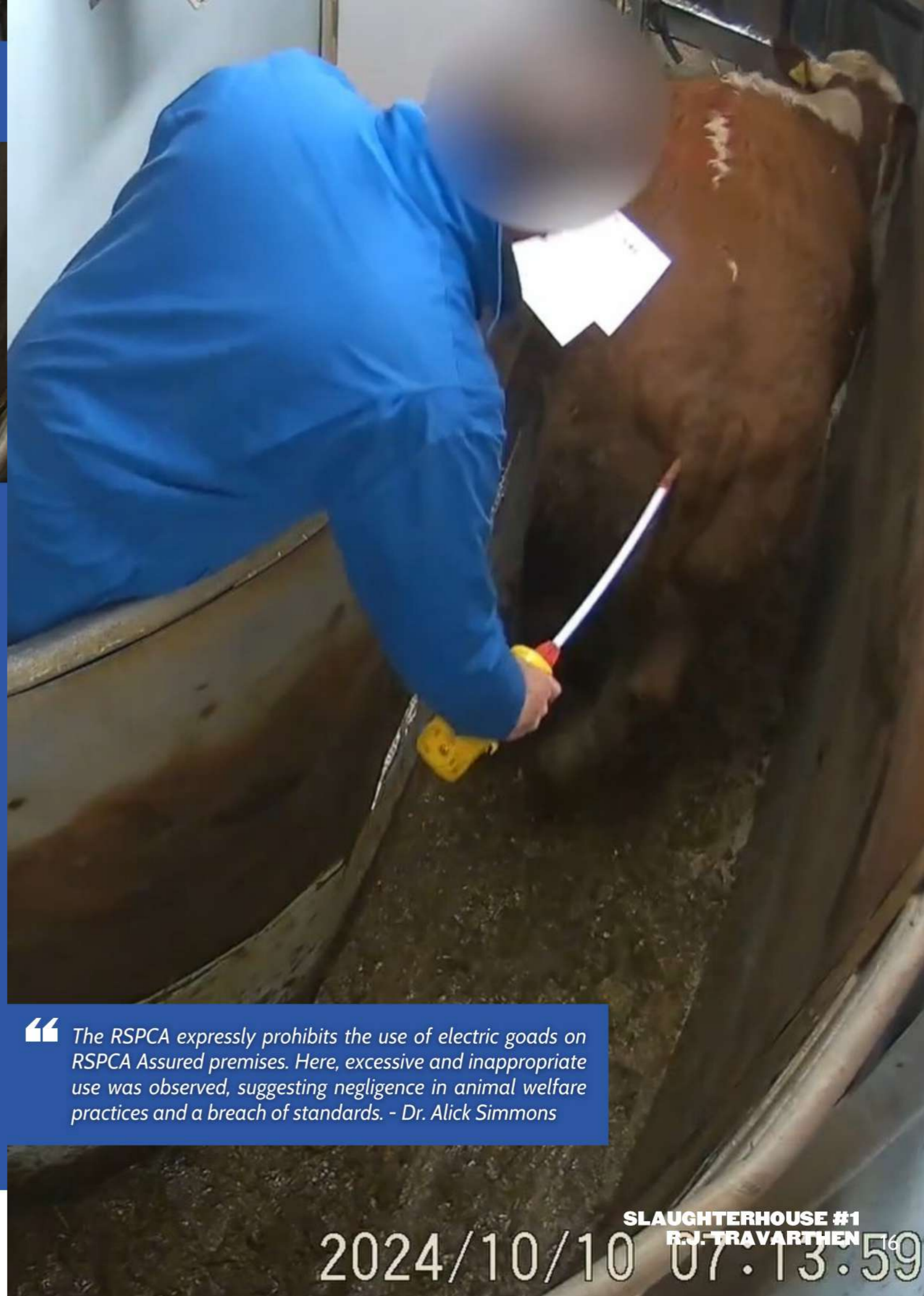
SLAUGHTERHOUSE #1 RJ TRAVARTHEN LTD.



- Worker documented hitting the cows in the face with a paddle, and then using an electric goad to get them off the truck.
- Cattle handling was especially crude, with shouting and use of a steel rod through ventilation slots to move animals.
- Electric goads were used excessively, including on the animals' heads and anus, contrary to government and RSPCA guidelines.
- The panic within the stunning box is distressing to observe, with vocalisations, attempting to turn around and becoming wedged, falling over, pulling their heads away from workers repeatedly, and violent escape attempts. This certainly does not seem to be a process that could be described as 'humane' or 'high welfare'.

LEGAL & WELFARE BREACHES

- ✗ Rough handling of cattle (4 breaches: AWA Section 9(2)(e), RSPCA S5.1, M4.1.1, and M4.6)
- ✗ Failure to handle cattle calmly and quietly (3 breaches: AWA Section 9(2)(e), RSPCA S5.1 and M4.1.1)
- ✗ Inappropriate use of equipment (electric prods and sticks) (3 breaches: RSPCA M4.7, M4.6, and S5.5)
- ✗ Inadequate stunning and restraint (4 breaches: AWA Section 9(2)(e), EC Article 3.1, WATOK Schedule 1, Paragraphs 14, 15, and 22)
- ✗ Slipping or falling hazards in the stun box (1 breach: WATOK Schedule 1, Paragraph 14)
- ✗ Excessive stun-to-stick interval (1 breach: WATOK Schedule 1, Paragraph 15)



“ The RSPCA expressly prohibits the use of electric goads on RSPCA Assured premises. Here, excessive and inappropriate use was observed, suggesting negligence in animal welfare practices and a breach of standards. - Dr. Alick Simmons



“The panic within the stunning box is distressing to observe, with vocalisations, attempting to turn around and becoming wedged, falling over, pulling their heads away from workers repeatedly, and violent escape attempts. This certainly does not seem to be a process that could be described as ‘humane’ or ‘high welfare’. - Alice Brough

SLAUGHTERHOUSE #2

HG BLAKE

Investigation: 21 Oct - 29 Oct 2024

Location: Norfolk

Species slaughtered: Cows, Lambs, Pigs



HG Blake summary

Expert testimonies confirmed unloading and handling of both sheep and pigs were found to be substandard and inconsistent with accepted welfare practices.

The facility has a responsibility to ensure animals are not subjected to unnecessary pain or distress, yet practices such as dragging sheep by the fleece or horns, and hitting pigs with boards, were observed, violating RSPCA welfare standards.

Stunning practices for both species was of particular concern. The shackling and hoisting of animals before the completion of electrical stunning was shown repeatedly, raising concerns on consciousness during the procedure. As well as being unacceptable it represents serious failures in management, staff training, and supervision.

"Several animals of both species are shackled and hoisted before stunning is complete. This is a clear breach of the regulations and the fact that this is repeatedly shown is of considerable concern. I recommend that you make the relevant enforcement body aware of this as soon as practical since every day this continues welfare is badly compromised."

- Dr. Alick Simmons



79%

PIGS & SHEEP WERE SHACKLED WHILE STUNNED

85%

PIGS HAD BAD POSITIONING WITH ELECTRIC TONGS

60%

PIGS & SHEEP WERE HOISTED WHILE STILL BEING STUNNED

SLAUGHTERHOUSE #2
HG BLAKE

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE EXPERTS - PIGS

SLAUGHTERHOUSE #2 HG BLAKE



- While unloading, pigs were handled unsympathetically. A pig-board and a paddle were deployed incorrectly and should not be used to hit the pigs.
- A group of panicked pigs, climbing on top of one another, are hit by two workers from above with a paddle and a pig board.
- Of the pigs shown being stunned, all were shackled and hoisted before stunning was complete suggesting that that the animals were conscious as they were being hoisted. The frequency suggests this may be common, highlighting a severe failure in management, supervision, and training, which is unacceptable.
- Electrode placement is not accurate; some are placed near the jaw and many are placed vertically, above and below the head. This decreases the likelihood of an effective stun due to increased soft tissue between electrodes.

LEGAL & WELFARE BREACHES

- ✗ Improper slap marking of pigs before entering the slaughterhouse (1 breach: AWA Section 9(2)(e))
- ✗ Rough handling of pigs in lairage (hitting with pig boards) (3 breaches: AWA Section 9(2)(e), Code of Practice 29 and 33, RSPCA M3.1 and S4.1)
- ✗ Scared pigs being struck while climbing on each other (3 breaches: AWA Section 9(2)(e), Code of Practice 29 and 33, RSPCA M3.1 and S4.1)
- ✗ Inadequate stunning leading to bleeding pig falling off shackle line (3 breaches: AWA Section 9(2)(e), WATOK Schedule 1, Paragraph 27, RSPCA S7.1)
- ✗ Stunned pig falling from the shackle line due to poor stunning technique (2 breaches: AWA Section 9(2)(e), WATOK Schedule 1, Paragraph 22)



Of the five pigs shown being stunned, all were shackled and hoisted before stunning was complete suggesting that that the animals were conscious as they were being hoisted. The number of times this was noted suggests that this may be a frequent occurrence. This is unacceptable and inexcusable, and it represents a substantial failure of management, supervision and training.” - Alick Simmons

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE EXPERTS - SHEEP

SLAUGHTERHOUSE #2 HG BLAKE

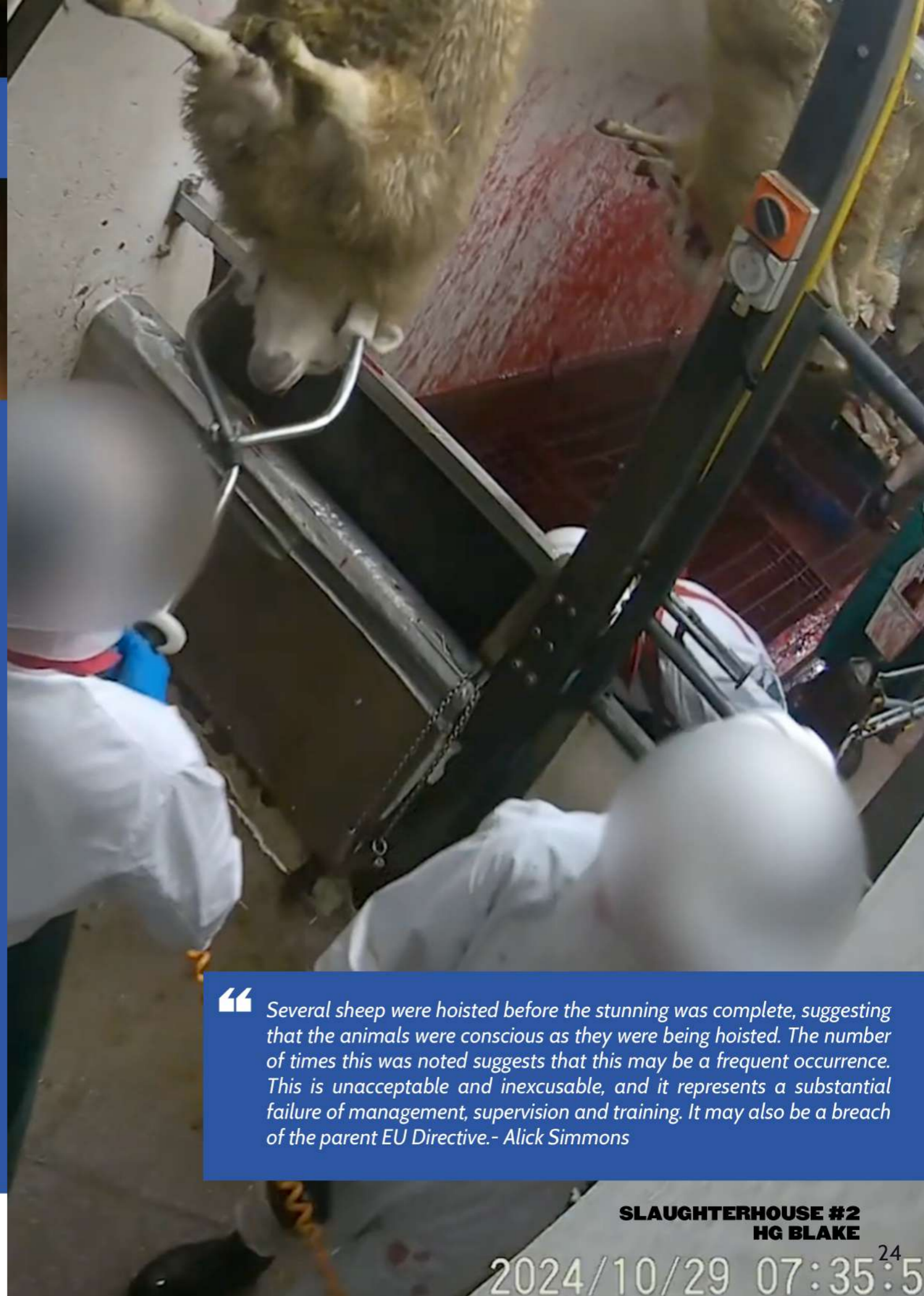


- Sheep are pulled out of transport by their heads, horns and wool, and dragged out violently by the back legs. This is extremely bad practice; it has the potential to cause injury, pain, and bruising, and risks snapping off the horn which would cause significant haemorrhaging.
- The tongs are applied in multiple different positions, and multiple times on several sheep. One is handled incredibly poorly – the tongs are applied in the wrong position multiple times, including on the face, for short bursts, and this causes the sheep to jump, flip and panic, remaining conscious throughout, before rejoining the group huddled in a corner.
- They appear terrified, running and jumping all over the pen and one jumping over the gate into the bleeding area. This should not be an eventuality that is allowed to happen; the bleeding area has a grated floor which could result in broken limbs of live animals, and they will be in contact with other animals dying and bleeding.

LEGAL & WELFARE BREACHES

- ✗ Rough handling of sheep during unloading (3 breaches: AWA Section 9(2)(e), RSPCA S5.1, and M4.1)
- ✗ Improper handling of sheep (dragging by wool and legs) (3 breaches: AWA Section 9(2)(e), RSPCA M4.3, and WATOK Schedule 1, Paragraph 4)
- ✗ Inadequate lairage conditions (3 breaches: AWA Section 9(2)(a) and 9(2)(c), WATOK Schedule 1, Paragraph 5)
- ✗ Inadequate stunning technique (multiple stuns) (3 breaches: AWA Section 9(2)(e), WATOK Schedule 1, Paragraph 27, RSPCA S7.1)
- ✗ Inadequate stunning leading to vomiting (2 breaches: AWA Section 9(2)(e), RSPCA S7.1)
- ✗ Failure to properly restrain sheep in stun/kill areas (sheep jumping barriers) (1 breach: WATOK Schedule 1, Paragraph 22)

SLAUGHTERHOUSE #2
H.G BLAKE 23



“ Several sheep were hoisted before the stunning was complete, suggesting that the animals were conscious as they were being hoisted. The number of times this was noted suggests that this may be a frequent occurrence. This is unacceptable and inexcusable, and it represents a substantial failure of management, supervision and training. It may also be a breach of the parent EU Directive.- Alick Simmons

SLAUGHTERHOUSE #2
HG BLAKE

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SLAUGHTERHOUSE #3

HP WESTWOOD

Investigation: 24 Oct, 25 Oct, 11 - 21 Nov 2024

Location: Staffordshire

Species slaughtered: Cows, Lambs, Pigs



HP Westwood summary

Expert testimonies found operating procedures in this slaughterhouse to be deeply concerning; they certainly breach legislation and RSPCA standards.

Both in unloading and in the stun room the handling is poor and not in accordance with good practice as sheep are dragged by the heads or by their fleece.

Stun to stick time averaged 20 seconds, with the longest gap being 27 seconds which is deeply unacceptable. Animals should be bled within 15 seconds to minimise the chance of recovery and regaining consciousness before having their throats cut or being 'dressed' (dismembered).

"The stunning of sheep in this slaughterhouse is deeply concerning; it certainly breaches legislation and RSPCA standards. I am informed that a review of all the footage has been performed and it was ascertained that stun to stick time averaged 20 seconds, with the longest gap being 27 seconds. If this is accurate, it is deeply unacceptable." - Dr. Alice Brough



72%
SHEEP HAD
CONCERNING POSITIONING
OF ELECTRIC TONGS

20 sec
AVERAGE STUN TO STICK TIME
(RSPCA STANDARD 15 SEC)

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE EXPERTS - SHEEP

SLAUGHTERHOUSE #3 HP WESTWOOD



- Sheep are yanked out of a trailer by their wool and goats by their horns. This is poor practice: pulling wool has the potential to cause injury, bruising and pain. Dragging by the horns risks snapping the horn causing significant haemorrhaging.
- Animals are thrown rather than moved, causing additional stress, risking pain and injury, and some losing their balance in the process.
- Electrodes are placed too far back on the neck, over thick wool, with multiple placements of the electrodes on each sheep, in many inappropriate positions. Electrodes are often clamped into the eye of the sheep, and touched onto the face, neck and head, shocking them but without fully stunning them.
- Stun to stick time appears to be longer than 15 seconds on many occasions, which increases chance of recovery before being bled.
- Workers are laughing and dancing while they are meant to be stunning and sticking sheep, who are waiting in fear.

**SLAUGHTERHOUSE #3
HP WESTWOOD**

LEGAL & WELFARE BREACHES

- ✗ Dragging sheep by wool and tackling a scared sheep (4 breaches): AWA Section 9(2)(e), EC Articles 3.1 and 3.2(d), Code of Practice 48, RSPCA S5.1, M4.1, and M4.3.
- ✗ Worker picking up sheep by wool and dropping to the ground, pulling sheep by the head (4 breaches): AWA Section 9(2)(e), EC Articles 3.1 and 3.2(d), Code of Practice 48, RSPCA S5.1, M4.1, and M4.3.
- ✗ Pulling sheep by neck and hitting with tongs during stunning (4 breaches): AWA Section 9(2)(e), EC Articles 3.1 and 3.2(d), Code of Practice 48, RSPCA S5.1, M4.1, and M4.3.
- ✗ Dragging sheep by neck to hasten others forward (4 breaches): AWA Section 9(2)(e), EC Articles 3.1 and 3.2(d), Code of Practice 48, RSPCA S5.1, M4.1, and M4.3.
- ✗ Lone sheep visibly panicking; excessive stun-to-stick interval (18.05 seconds) (3 breaches): AWA Section 9(2)(e), EC Articles 3.1 and 3.2(d), RSPCA S7.4.
- ✗ Chatting during stun; excessive stun-to-stick interval (20.24 seconds) (3 breaches): AWA Section 9(2)(e), EC Articles 3.1 and 3.2(d), RSPCA S7.4.
- ✗ Sheep struck in eye with tongs multiple times; excessive stun-to-stick interval (6 breaches): AWA Section 9(2)(e), EC Articles 3.1 and 3.2(d), RSPCA S2.7 and S7.4, WATOK Schedule 1, Paragraphs 22, 23, and 27.
- ✗ Sheep paddling, blinking, and possibly conscious when throat slit (2 breaches): AWA Section 9(2)(e), RSPCA S7.4.

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KEY FINDINGS FROM THE EXPERTS - COWS

SLAUGHTERHOUSE #3 HP WESTWOOD



- It looks as though the stunning box has a very slippery floor; this increases the risk of failing to deliver controlled, accurate bolts, as the cows are slipping around and panicking.
- On exit from the stun box, the bolt gun is dropped multiple times during an attempt to rectify, presumably, a failed stun. This attempt takes considerable time, and workers are heard laughing as it unfolds. It looks as though four shots are necessary, with the cow appearing to continue rhythmic breathing (indicating life), for some of this prolonged attempt. They are then bled from the lying position at the exit of the stunning box.
- From the majority of the cows' demeanours in the stun box, exhibiting panic, escape attempts and vocalising, this part of moving and confinement does not appear to be a stress-free experience.

**SLAUGHTERHOUSE #3
HP WESTWOOD**

LEGAL & WELFARE BREACHES

- ✗ Cow slipping on non-slip flooring (1 breach): RSPCA S5.4.
- ✗ Visibly distressed cow reacts negatively to human interaction; possible ineffective stun without immediate re-stunning (2 breaches): RSPCA S7.1.6 (delayed re-stunning), S9(2)(e) AWA protect from pain or distress.
- ✗ Workers shouting, clapping, and hitting to encourage cow entry, causing distress and pain (4 breaches): AWA Section 9(2)(e), EC Articles 3.1 and 3.2(d), RSPCA S2.11, S5.1, and M4.1.1.
- ✗ Cow repeatedly hit on head with failed stunning attempts, followed by delayed effective stun (6 breaches): AWA Section 9(2)(e), EC Articles 3.1 and 3.2(d), WATOK Schedule 1 (Paragraphs 22, 23, 24, and 25), RSPCA S7.3 (stunning pen construction and restraint).
- ✗ Ineffective stunning, cow stands up and breathes visibly between delayed stunning attempts (6 breaches): AWA Section 9(2)(e), EC Articles 3.1 and 3.2(d), WATOK Schedule 1 (Paragraphs 22, 23, 24, and 25), RSPCA S7.4 (effective stunning before release).

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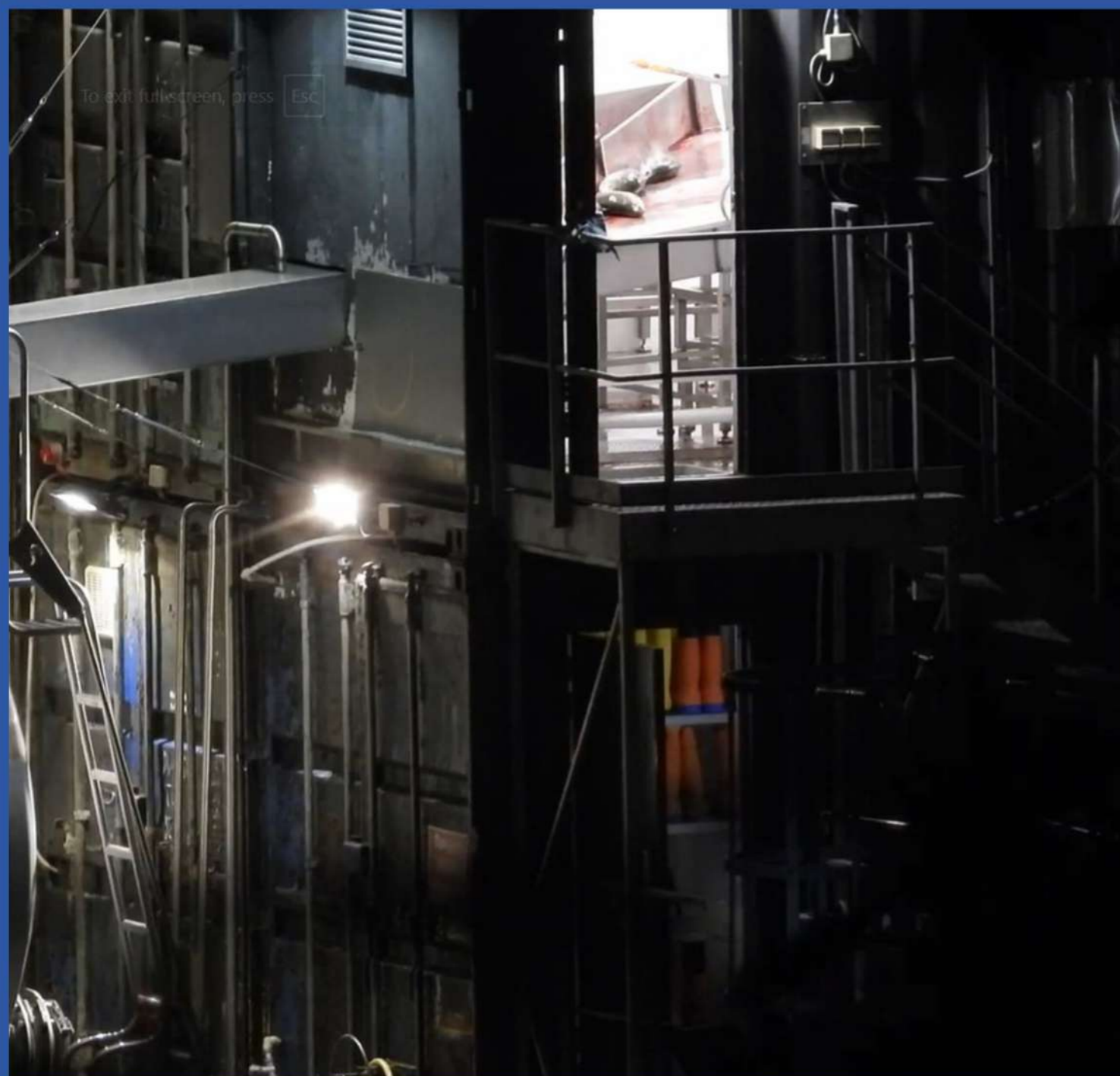
SLAUGHTERHOUSE #4

ARDYNE HARVEST STATION

Investigation: 19 May 2024

Location: Scotland

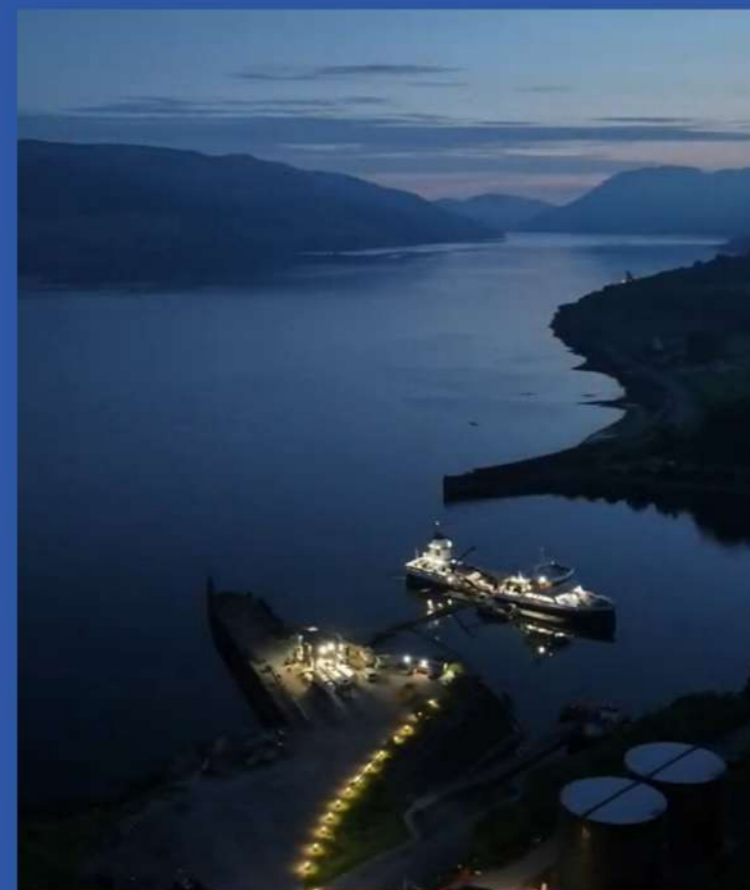
Species slaughtered: Atlantic Salmon



Ardyne Harvest summary

Methods of slaughter, including carbon dioxide exposure, suffocation in air or on ice, or bleeding without prior stunning, are explicitly deemed unacceptable by the RSPCA Guidance due to the significant animal welfare concerns they present. The only method that aligns with humane slaughter standards is percussive stunning followed immediately by effective bleeding to ensure the animal is insensible and does not suffer.

Despite these clear guidelines, at this RSPCA Assured facility, at least 25 instances in a 3 hour period have been documented where fish were not properly stunned or displayed clear signs of life during or after the bleeding process. Disturbingly, some fish were observed alive as their throats were cut or while they were being "dressed"—a process involving dismemberment. Such incidents highlight critical failings in adherence to humane slaughter practices, raising serious concerns about the facility's compliance with animal welfare standards and its oversight processes.



IN A 3 HOUR PERIOD
THERE WERE AT LEAST

25

CASES WHERE FISH ARE
NOT PROPERLY STUNNED
AND/OR DISPLAY SIGNS OF
LIFE FOLLOWING BLEEDING

“The safeguards and assessment of the system appear to be lacking, given the volume of improperly stunned / slaughtered fish and it appears that they are either not reported, the equipment is not checked and/or the issue is simply not rectified. Accordingly, there isn't compliance with good practice.” - Ayesha Smart

KEY FINDINGS BY THE EXPERTS - SALMON

SLAUGHTERHOUSE #4 ARDYNE HARVEST



- There is a clear incident whereby an ineffectively slaughtered fish it then suffocated by way of their gills being covered in order to kill.
- The use of the priest or secondary stunner must be available throughout the killing process to allow a percussive blow to be administered immediately in the event of a fish not being effectively stunned. However, there should be safeguards in place to assess the effectiveness of the stun in all fish and ensure that all fish that are not effectively stunned are re-stunned immediately.
- The attempts to re-stun at 4.41 using the priest are haphazard and ineffective causing further pain and suffering to the salmon.

LEGAL & WELFARE BREACHES

✘ Ensure that the animal is protected from suffering, injury and disease in accordance with good practice: Ardyne Harvest Station have a duty pursuant to s24 (3)(e) Animal Health and Welfare Act (Scotland) Act 2006.

✘ The RSPCA Assured Guidance, stipulates: S1.8 that there should a percussive blow to the top of the head just behind the eyes of sufficient force to kill the individual or cause immediate loss of consciousness that lasts until death.

A Movement Towards the End of RSPCA Assured Cruelty

Our exposé is not the first time that suffering and regulation breaches have been exposed on RSPCA farms. 12 animal protection organisations and individuals have collectively released at least 35 undercover investigations into RSPCA Assured farms in the last 16 years, showcasing extreme animal cruelty.

Earlier in 2024, the Amazon Prime documentary Pignorant by Joey Carbstong showcased the severe suffering experienced by pigs in RSPCA Assured gas chambers, and also shows a worker beating a pig to death with a metal bar on an RSPCA Assured farm. This documentary takes a strong focus on the failure of the RSPCA Assured scheme to protect animals, and its role in misleading the British public.

Between 2009 and 2017, Animal Aid inserted secret cameras into 15 slaughterhouses as part of a campaign for greater transparency. They found that the one RSPCA Assured slaughterhouse in Essex they investigated in 2011 had some of the “worst abuses” out of all of them with workers stubbing out cigarettes into pigs’ faces.

Almost all of the salmon farms in the UK are assured by the RSPCA, but following a series of damning exposés from organisations such as Viva!, Animal Equality, and Wildfish which found sea lice infections, overcrowding and graphic injuries, the RSPCA’s own President Chris Packham called for a moratorium on salmon farming and a boycott of all salmon farms (including from RSPCA salmon farms).

Two of the laying hen farms and two of the salmon farms we investigated as part of this report have already been subject to undercover investigations in 2023 and 2020 by other animal organisations and deeply disturbing conditions were found then too. Only one of these farms was ever suspended by the RSPCA and they were reinstated just one month later. On our repeat visit to these farms we found similar suffering and breaches of laws.

The failure of the RSPCA Assured scheme to act on suffering and provide even basic regulation and enforcement on its farms is reflective of a wider problem within the industry to offer basic levels of protection to animals. In 2022, Animal Equality published a report entitled “The Enforcement Problem” and detailed how animal farming falls consistently foul of regulations due to near total lack of monitoring and enforcement of farming.

It is clear that there is long-term and widespread failure of this scheme. Eleven animal organisations (ourselves included) have independently and collectively worked to expose the truth behind what is happening on RSPCA farms for many years. It is clear the RSPCA needs to drop the Assured scheme. We wish to express thanks to these organisations exposing the truth behind RSPCA Assured in recent years, and also thanks to all those we cannot mention.



Image from an Animal Justice Project investigation

WE WISH TO EXPRESS THANKS TO THESE ORGANISATIONS EXPOSING THE TRUTH BEHIND RSPCA ASSURED IN RECENT YEARS, AND ALSO THANKS TO ALL THOSE WE CANNOT MENTION:

ANIMAL JUSTICE PROJECT, ANIMAL AID, ANIMAL EQUALITY, VIVA!, GEN V, DIRECT ACTION EVERYWHERE, JOEY CARBSTONG, HILLSIDE ANIMAL SANCTUARY, WILDFISH, SURGE, SCOTTISH SALMON WATCH, MEGAN MCCUBBIN 32

CLOSING STATEMENT

The RSPCA has the opportunity to take a bold and transformative stance, inspiring other organisations and society at large to reimagine a world where slaughterhouses no longer exist.

Our investigation into RSPCA Assured slaughterhouses highlights that these facilities are no different from any other slaughterhouse. Despite assurances of humane or higher welfare practices, the reality is that no slaughterhouse operates with compassion for the animals that end their lives there.

While improving the conditions for animals trapped within the current food system is essential, any welfare strategy aimed at preventing cruelty must, at a minimum, avoid endorsing practices that perpetuate suffering, such as factory farming and slaughter. Where possible, initiatives should pivot to working synergistically with strategies to reduce the number of animals farmed and killed with an aim to end all animal exploitation.

The RSPCA has the opportunity to take a bold and transformative stance, inspiring other organisations and society at large to reimagine a world where slaughterhouses no longer exist. We want nothing more than to work closely to pursue this mission. As the RSPCA celebrates their 200th year anniversary, it's time to honour their bold founding values of animal protection—not by compromise, but by leading the charge to end animal farming and slaughter once and for all.



The full dossier of evidence gathered from the RSPCA Assured slaughterhouses has been submitted to the authorities and is available to anyone who wants further information.



Charlie the pig, rescued from an RSPCA Assured farm

