

Culling small numbers of poultry on farm

SUMMARY

- It is occasionally necessary to cull small numbers of poultry on their farm of production, for example because they are ill, injured, or poor developers.
- It is an offence for a person responsible for an animal to fail to act, causing an animal to suffer.
- This technical note is a guide to the laws in Scotland that govern culling (as opposed to slaughter for food consumption), what methods are available, and what methods are suitable under various circumstances.

Legal position in Scotland

The Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing (Scotland) Regulations 2012 (WATOK(S)) has transposed the related European Council Regulation 1099/2009 into Scottish law. For some elements of killing, including killing outside of slaughterhouses, the Welfare of Animals at Slaughter and Killing 1995 (WASK) Regulations are still in effect. The culling methods given below are those that are legally permitted in Scotland.

Methods: their pros and cons

In all cases, the person to conduct the killing must be deemed competent in the method he or she is to use. Birds should be caught individually, quietly and calmly, and restrained in a manner that does not cause them further pain or distress, and handling should be kept to a minimum before killing. Restraint may be by hand, or you may use additional restraint devices (particularly for large birds) such as a cone.



Figure 1: The recommended hand position for manual cervical dislocation: 'V' method. The index and middle fingers are used to make a 'V', with the thumb under the bird's jaw (thumb moved for clarity here).



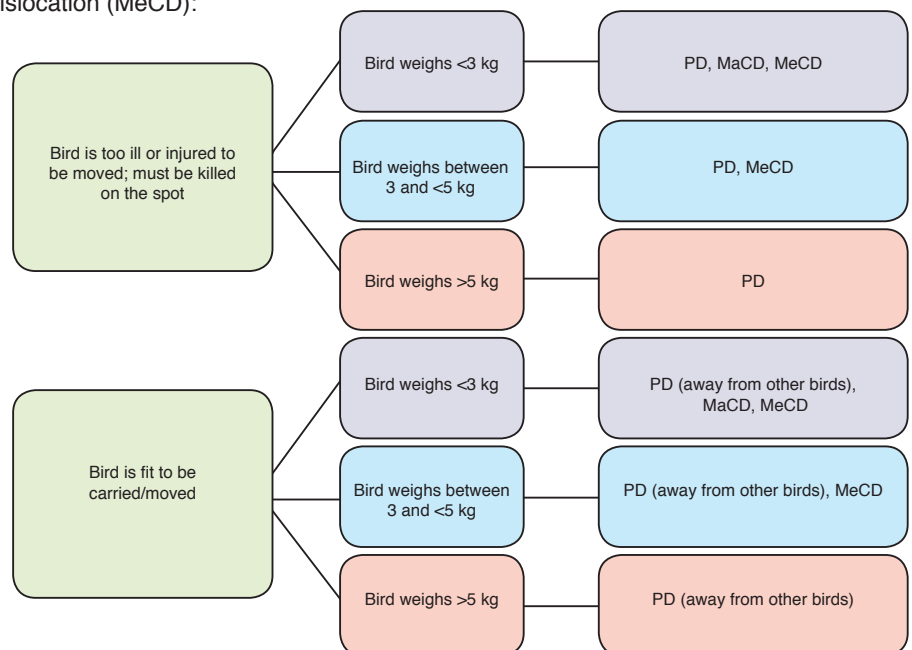
Figure 2: The non-recommended hand position for manual cervical dislocation: 'ring' method.

Method	Pros	Cons	Useful for
Percussive device Cartridge powered such as the CASH poultry killer (CPK), or pneumatic such as the Turkey Euthanasia Device (TED).	Renders the bird immediately unconscious.	Some devices are expensive to buy, and awkward or heavy to carry. Device needs reloading (less frequently with TED), and regular maintenance to work properly. Health and safety of operator. Application causes a popping sound which may disturb other birds nearby.	Large poultry such as turkeys, geese, breeding birds.
Manual cervical dislocation Permissible in poultry up to 3 kg, but no more than 70 birds/person/day. Should not be used as a routine method of killing, but only where no other methods are available.	No equipment required. Birds can be killed in place without having to be moved which can cause further pain and distress. See Figures 1 and 2 for guidance on hand placement.	Time to unconsciousness is not as rapid as with percussive devices. If done improperly, bird will suffer until the method is reapplied properly.	Chicks, pullets, laying hens, broilers up to 3 kg.
Mechanical cervical dislocation Permissible in poultry up to 5 kg. No limit on numbers of birds/person/day. Methods include using a killing cone + neck clamp or using a heavy stick.	All methods require little equipment and are relatively inexpensive.	Time to unconsciousness is not as rapid as with percussive devices. Killing cone + clamp requires that the bird is carried to the apparatus, which could prolong or exacerbate pain or distress. Heavy stick needs a solid floor to be effective, and preferably two people (one person holding the bird, one placing the stick over the neck). Bird may experience choking before dislocation and unconsciousness occur.	Pullets, laying hens, broilers, turkeys, geese, and breeding birds up to 5 kg.

Other methods that are permissible but less common for occasional culling include penetrative captive bolt devices, firearm with free projectile, maceration (in chicks up to 72 h and egg embryos only), exposure to gas mixtures within a shed or gas container, and electrical stunning. Note that pliers (e.g. 'Semark pliers', or sheep castrating devices such as the Burdizzo) are not a legal method, because they kill by crushing the wind pipe rather than by dislocation.

Which method to choose?

Percussive device (PD) manual cervical dislocation (MaCD) or mechanical cervical dislocation (MeCD):



Useful information

Humane Slaughter Association: guide on practical slaughter of poultry (<http://www.hsa.org.uk/introduction-1/introduction-3>) More detail on WASK, European Council Regulation 1099/2009, and WATOK(S) can be found on the Scottish Government's website: <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/farmingrural/Agriculture/animal-welfare/AnimalWelfare/slaughter>

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