

Compassion In World Farming Briefing

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The Mutilations (Permitted Procedures) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2010 came into force on 23 December 2010.

A Regulation was enacted in 2002 banning the beak trimming of laying hens from 1 January 2011.

Beak trimming is carried out to prevent feather pecking and cannibalism. However, scientific research shows that the correct way to prevent these problems is not to beak trim the birds, but to keep them in good conditions – in particular to provide opportunities for them to forage and ground-peck – and to select for birds that are less prone to feather pecking and cannibalism.

The Government (and the previous Government) took the view that farmers are not ready to prevent these problems without beak trimming and accordingly these Regulations remove the ban on beak trimming. However, the Regulations do ban the hot-blade method (except

in emergencies) and only permit the use of infra-red trimming. The Government has made it clear that its long-term aim is to ban all forms of routine beak trimming. It has said that it will review the situation in 2015, with a view to banning all routine beak trimming in 2016.

The Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2010 came into force on 23 December 2010.

These Regulations implement the EU Directive on the welfare of chickens reared for meat (broilers). The Directive is largely disappointing, doing little to address the main welfare problems that affect intensively produced broilers.

The Directive sets a maximum density of 33 kg/m² (around 16 birds/m²) but, by way of derogation, permits Member States to allow the keeping of broilers up to a maximum of 39 kg/m² (around 19 birds/m²) provided that a number of welfare

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conditions are met. By way of further derogation, Member States may allow broilers to be kept up to a maximum of 42 kg/m² (around 20 birds/m²) if certain further criteria are fulfilled. We are pleased that the Government has set a maximum stocking density of 39 kg/m² rather than the Directive's permitted maximum of 42 kg/m². That said, we believe that even 39 kg/m² is far too high and places bird welfare at risk.

The Directive does nothing to address the high level of leg disorders that mainly arise from the fact that today's broilers have been pushed (largely through genetic selection) to reach their slaughter weight in about 38 days, which is around twice as fast as 35 years ago.