CHAPTER 7.Y.

KILLING OF REPTILES FOR THEIR SKINS, MEAT AND OTHER PRODUCTS

Article 7.Y.1.

Scope

The recommendations in this chapter address the need to ensure the welfare of chelonians, crocodilians, lacertilians and ophidians, during the process of killing them for their skins, meat and other products.

Article 7.Y.2.

Definitions

For the purpose of this chapter:

Restraint: means any acceptable physical or chemical method of reducing, or eliminating, voluntary or reactive movement of the reptile, to facilitate efficient stunning or killing.

Stunning: means the procedure that causes immediate unconsciousness until the animal is dead, or causes the absence of pain, distress and suffering until the onset of unconsciousness, according to the outcomes defined in this chapter for the species covered.

Unconsciousness: means the state of unawareness caused by temporary or permanent disruption of brain function.

Pithing: means a method carried out by inserting a rod or probe through the foramen magnum (or the hole from a penetrative captive bolt or gunshot), into the brain to ensure thorough brain destruction.

Article 7.Y.3.

General considerations

1. Animal Welfare Plan

Facilities in which reptiles are killed should have an animal welfare plan and associated procedures. The purpose of such a plan should be to maintain good animal welfare at all stages of handling of animals until their death.

The animal welfare plan should contain standard operating procedures for each step of animal handling to ensure that it is properly implemented, based on relevant indicators shown in Article 7.Y.5. It should also include corrective actions to address specific risks, for example, power failures or other circumstances that could negatively affect the welfare of animals.

2. Competency and training of the personnel

Animal handlers should be competent in handling and moving reptiles, as well as understanding relevant behaviours of these animals and the underlying animal welfare and technical principles necessary to carry out their tasks.

There should be sufficient number of personnel, who should be competent and familiar with the recommendations outlined in this chapter and their application within the national context.
The manager of the facility should ensure that personnel are competent and carry out their tasks in accordance with the guiding principles for animal welfare in Article 7.1.2.

Competence may be gained through formal training or practical experience. This competence should be verified by the Competent Authority or an independent body accredited by it.

3. Source of animals

Animals should be acquired legally in accordance with national jurisdictions and international treaties, including the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

 Relevant documentation related to the source of the animals should accompany the animals.

If animals captured in the wild are to be used, capture and transport techniques should be humane and give due regard to human and animal health, welfare and safety.

4. Behaviour

Handling and killing methods should take into account specific reptile behaviours such as:

‒ reptiles are sensitive to and will respond to visual and tactile stimuli as well as noise and vibrations;

‒ the restraint and handling of reptiles can be difficult because of their agility and strength;

‒ reptiles can inflict significant bite wounds to handlers and wound infection or envenomation are not uncommon;

‒ low body temperatures may result in slow movements, torpor and reduced responsiveness that should not be regarded as indicators of quiescence or unconsciousness;

‒ absence of vocalisation is common or normal in reptiles, even in highly traumatic situations.

Article 7.Y.4.

Selection of a killing process

In the case of reptiles, the killing process may involve a stunning and a subsequent killing step or a direct killing method.

Criteria which may influence the choice of methods used in the process include:

‒ level of knowledge and skill required to perform the procedure effectively;

‒ safety of the operator;

‒ compatibility with processing requirements and animal product purpose;

‒ in the case of the use of drugs, the drug availability, licensing and use requirements, possible human abuse, and implications for other product uses such as consumption by animals or humans;

‒ ability to maintain equipment in proper working order;

‒ cost of the method;
The *killing* process used should:

- avoid excitement, fear and stress to the animal;
- be appropriate for the species, size, age and health of the animal;
- be reliable and reproducible;
- ensure that any stunning used is in accordance with Article 7.Y.2.; and
- include the use of a *killing* method if the stunning method does not result in death of the animal during unconsciousness.

Article 7.Y.5.

**Criteria (or measurables) for the outcome of the stunning and killing of reptiles**

The following animal-based criteria (or measurables) can be useful indicators of *animal welfare*. The use of these criteria and their appropriate thresholds should be adapted to the different methods used to stun and kill reptiles. These criteria can be considered as tools to monitor the impact of the method and management used, given that both of these can affect *animal welfare*.

**Criteria to measure the effectiveness of stunning and killing methods**

Whilst multiple criteria are preferable for the establishment of unconsciousness or *death*, the presence of any of the following criteria should be regarded as sufficient to establish suspicion of consciousness:

- pupillary response to light;
- pupillary response to objects or movement;
- eye movement in response to objects or movement;
- blink or nictitating membrane responses to touch or contact of the cornea;
- spontaneous eyelid opening or closing;
- intentional defensive responses;
- tongue movement.

In addition to the absence of all the criteria above, *death* may be inferred by confirming permanent cessation of the following:

- response to somatic stimuli applied to the head, indicating brain activity;
- respiration;
- cardiac activity (while presence of a heartbeat does not necessarily mean that an animal is alive, permanent cessation of a heartbeat indicates death).


**Physical restraint**

Physical restraint is often required in the process of *stunning* and *killing* of reptiles. Special considerations for the restraint of reptiles are needed due to the physical and behavioural characteristics of this taxonomic group.
Recommendations for effective physical restraint in relation to animal welfare

The method of restraint should:

- avoid injuries due to excessive pressure applied by equipment or personnel;
- be applied rapidly to avoid excessive or prolonged struggling of the animal;
- exclude features that may cause pain or injury;
- not hoist or suspend animals by the feet, legs, tail or head;
- not restrain only one area of the body (e.g. head or neck) leaving the rest able to move excessively;
- ensure animals can breathe freely through the nostrils where the mouth is restrained;
- adequately support the animal's body when moving it;
- avoid taping or binding the legs or feet of the animals as the sole method of restraint, and where required, the method should not cause injuries or pain;
- not break legs, cut limb tendons or blind animals in order to immobilise them;
- not sever the spinal cord to immobilise animals.

Animal-based criteria (or measurables): excessive struggling, excessive movements, trauma and injuries.

Article 7.Y.7.

Introduction to stunning and killing methods

Stunning may be used to facilitate the killing of reptiles. Stunning methods may result in the death of the animal following unconsciousness, or may require an additional killing step.

If stunning is used, the method should:

- be appropriate for the species, size, age and health of the animal;
- be reliable and reproducible;
- avoid excitement, fear and stress to the animal;
- avoid or minimise restraint in accordance with Article 7.Y.6.;
- result in the immediate onset of unconsciousness or the absence of pain, distress and suffering until the onset of unconsciousness that lasts until the animal is dead;
- be followed by a killing method if stunning does not result in death of the animal during unconsciousness.

The equipment used should be maintained and operated properly in accordance with the manufacturer’s recommendations, in particular with regard to the species and size of the animal. The maintenance of the equipment is the responsibility of the management of the facility, and should be under the supervision of the Competent Authority or accredited delegated body. If the primary method of stunning fails to produce unconsciousness as described in Article 7.Y.5., a back-up stunning or killing method should be used immediately (Articles 7.Y.8. to 7.Y.15.).

Animal-based criteria (or measurables): immediate onset of unconsciousness or death as described in Article 7.Y.5.
Article 7.Y.8.

Electrical stunning (for crocodilians only)

Electrical stunning is the application of an electric current through electrodes for the purpose of causing immediate unconsciousness that lasts until death.

Recommendations for effective use in relation to animal welfare:

– the equipment and the procedure for its application should be approved by the Competent Authority an accredited designated authority;
– apparatus should deliver sufficient current through the brain;
– the equipment should be scientifically validated, tested and calibrated prior to use and maintained according to a set protocol;
– minimum electrical parameters (current, voltage and frequency) should be applied;
– minimum stun duration should be achieved;
– animals should be killed in accordance to Articles 7.Y.9. to 7.Y.15. without delay following confirmation of effective stunning to avoid recovery of consciousness.

Animal-based criteria (or measurables): immediate onset of unconsciousness as described in Article 7.Y.5.


Penetrative captive bolt

The aim of this method is to produce a state of unconsciousness and cause severe damage to the brain by the impact and penetration of a captive bolt using a mechanical device. The force of impact and the physical damage caused by the passage of the bolt should result in immediate unconsciousness and death. If death does not occur following the passage of the penetrative bolt, then an additional killing method in accordance with Articles 7.Y.9. to 7.Y.15. should be used immediately to ensure death.

Recommendations for the effective use in relation to animal welfare:

– animals should be effectively restrained;
– the device should be correctly positioned on the head to result in the penetration of the brain by the bolt;
– the bolt should be of appropriate mass, length, diameter and shape;
– cartridge or compressed air specifications should be determined to deliver the correct bolt velocity;
– equipment and charge should be selected to suit the type and size of animal;
– equipment should be cleaned, maintained and stored, following manufacturer’s recommendations.

Animal-based criteria (or measurables): immediate onset of unconsciousness and death as described in Article 7.Y.5.
Article 7.Y.10.

**Non-penetrative captive bolt**

The non-penetrative captive bolt method is sometimes called ‘concussive stunning’, although concussion is the underlying principle for both penetrative and non-penetrative methods. The concussion may result in both unconsciousness and death. If death does not occur following the application of the percussive blow, then an additional killing method in accordance with Articles 7.Y.9. to 7.Y.15. should be used immediately to assure death.

Recommendations for an effective use in relation to animal welfare:

- animals should be effectively restrained;
- the device should be correctly positioned on the head to allow optimum transfer of energy to the brain;
- the bolt should be of appropriate mass, diameter and shape;
- cartridge or compressed air specifications should be determined to deliver the correct bolt velocity;
- equipment and charge should be selected to suit the type and size of animal;
- equipment should be cleaned, maintained and stored, preferably following manufacturer’s recommendations.

Outcome-based criteria (or measurable): immediate onset of unconsciousness or death as described in Article 7.Y.5.

Article 7.Y.11.

**Percussive blow to the head**

A percussive blow to the head to induce cerebral concussion can be achieved manually. A concussive state is normally associated with a sudden loss of consciousness with associated loss of reflexes. Inducing unconsciousness requires the transfer of sufficient energy into the brain to disrupt normal neural function. If the severity of the blow is sufficient then it will result in the death of the animal. If death does not occur following the application of the percussive blow, then an additional killing method in accordance with Articles 7.Y.9. to 7.Y.15. should be used immediately to ensure death.

Recommendations for effective use in relation to animal welfare:

- animals should be effectively restrained;
- the blow should be correctly applied to result in optimum transfer of energy to the brain;
- the tool should be of appropriate size and weight, and the blow of sufficient force to induce concussion;
- equipment and method should be selected to suit the type and size of animal.

Animal-based criteria (or measurables): immediate onset of unconsciousness or death as described in Article 7.Y.5.

Article 7.Y.12.

**Gunshot**

An effective gunshot, where the projectile enters the brain, can cause immediate unconsciousness and death. A gunshot to the heart or neck does not immediately render an animal unconscious and therefore should not be used. If death does not occur following the gunshot, then an additional killing method in accordance with Articles 7.Y.9. to 7.Y.15. should be used immediately to ensure death.
Manual restraint of the animal should not be used due to safety concerns for humans in the line of fire.

Recommendations for effective use in relation to animal welfare:

– ensure accurate targeting of the brain;
– select firearm and projectile suitable for the type and size of animal;
– equipment should be cleaned and stored following manufacturer’s recommendations.

Animal-based criteria (or measurables): immediate onset of unconsciousness or death as described in Article 7.Y.5.

**Pithing**

Pithing is a method carried out by inserting a rod or probe through the foramen magnum or shot hole from a penetrative captive bolt or gunshot, into the brain to ensure thorough brain destruction. After insertion of the rod or probe it should be promptly turned four to six times in a centrifugal motion to ensure destruction of the brain tissue.

Recommendations for effective use in relation to animal welfare:

– should only be used in unconscious animals;
– movement of the pithing implement should ensure maximum destruction of brain tissue.

Animal-based criteria (or measurables): confirmation of death as described in Article 7.Y.5.

**Decapitation or spinal cord severance**

Decapitation involves cutting the neck of the animal, between the skull and the first cervical vertebra using a sharp instrument (guillotine, axe or blade) leading to severance of the head. For some reptile species, this method is not anatomically feasible. For severance of the spinal cord, complete separation of the head from the neck is not necessary. Some reptiles may remain conscious for over an hour after decapitation or spinal cord severance, which makes this method acceptable only in stunned and unconscious animals and when followed by immediate destruction of the brain by pithing or percussive blow.

Recommendations for effective use in relation to animal welfare:

– should only be used on unconscious animals;
– should always be followed immediately by physical intervention to destroy the brain, i.e. immediate crushing of the brain or pithing.

Animal-based criteria (or measurables): confirmation of death as described in Article 7.Y.5.

**Chemical agents**

There are a number of acceptable chemical agents that can be used for the restraint or killing of reptiles. The use of these agents for either restraint or killing should be supervised by veterinarians or veterinary paraprofessionals in accordance with the requirements of the Competent Authority. If death does not occur following administration of the agent, then an additional killing method in accordance with Articles 7.Y.9 to 7.Y.15 should be used immediately to ensure death.
Recommendations for effective use in relation to animal welfare:

– ensure proper physical restraint is used for administration;
– ensure chemicals and dosage used are appropriate for the animal;
– ensure the route of administration is appropriate for the animal;

Animal-based criteria (or measurables): confirmation of death as described in Article 7.Y.5.

Article 7.Y.16.

Methods that are unacceptable for stunning and killing reptiles

Due to particular anatomical and physiological characteristics of reptiles the use of any method other than those described in Articles 7.Y.9. to Article 7.Y15., are considered inappropriate and unacceptable. Some examples of unacceptable methods are:

– exanguination,
– freezing or cooling,
– heating or boiling,
– suffocation or drowning,
– inflation using compressed gas or liquid,
– live evisceration or skinning,
– constriction bands to induce cardiac arrest,
– inhaled carbon dioxide (CO₂), carbon monoxide (CO) or nitrogen (N),
– paralytic agent drugs.
References


