



Crustacean Welfare – information statement. (Jan 2026)

Overview

The SAGB recognises that to ensure maximum condition is maintained all shellfish need to be treated with respect throughout the supply chain, for welfare, economic and quality reasons. The SAGB urges industry throughout the supply chain to follow, promote and support the recently created [Codes of Practice for Crustacean Welfare](#) and to treat all live shellfish with respect. Industry, government representatives and NGOs participated in/contributed to the development of these Codes of Practice.

The Law in the UK (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland)

The [Animal Welfare \(Sentience\) Act 2022](#) specifically names decapod crustacea and cephalopod molluscs as being deemed as 'animals' under the welfare act and thus sentient (ie can feel pain).

This means that they now also fall under [The Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing Act 2015](#) (WATOK) – this is England only, however Wales and NI have similarly worded regulations.

Schedule 4 of WATOK states:

Humane Killing:

(1) No person engaged in the restraint, stunning or killing of an animal may —

(a) cause any avoidable pain, distress or suffering to that animal; or

(b) permit that animal to sustain any avoidable pain, distress or suffering.

(2) No person may engage in the restraint, stunning or killing of an animal unless that person has the knowledge and skill necessary to perform those operations humanely and efficiently.

Whilst the law suggests that WATOK does currently apply, the government has not, to date, given any specific guidance as to the interpretation of what this means in practice to anyone in the commercial supply chain or the end consumer.

However in the [Animal Welfare Strategy policy paper for England](#), published in December 2025, Defra state they intend to:

- *publish guidance on which methods of killing decapods are compatible with the existing welfare at time of killing legal requirements, including by clarifying that live boiling is not an acceptable killing method*

NOTE - Once this Defra guidance is issued, this SAGB statement will be updated

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Crustacean welfare Laws elsewhere

Only a small number of countries worldwide have regulations regarding crustaceans these are:

- Formal nationwide controls: New Zealand, Switzerland, Austria and Norway.
- Provincial/state formal controls: parts of Italy, Australia and Canada.
- Informal guidelines: parts of Australia & Canada.

The USA and the EU (including France, Spain and Portugal) do not recognise crustaceans as animals under their animal welfare acts and there are no controls over welfare, despatch or handling.

Contents of the 'expected' Defra Guidance under WATOK.

Defra have not, yet, confirmed definitively, what will be in the guidance, so we can only surmise but we *believe* it may contain:

Conscious boiling will be deemed as incompatible with WATOK - as will, conscious freezing, chilling, ice baths, prior to cooking.

Acceptable recommended methods of dispatch are likely only to be:

- Electric stunning (to render insensible) prior to killing by cooking.
- Mechanical killing prior to cooking – which means:
 - Double spiking of crabs
 - Full length body splitting of lobster like crustacea (langoustines, crawfish, lobsters)

Additionally, we believe this guidance will only be for dispatch on land of the larger crustaceans, not for prawns, shrimps etc

Context

SAGB has been extensively involved with the industry engagement regarding the development of the Defra guidance, however we remain concerned that the main aims of the guidance were set in advance of the development and, as such, we are concerned at potential impact on industry. SAGB insisted Defra had to carry out an impact assessment on the financial effect on the industry of the guidance, which they have done, albeit in a *de minimis* manner. We are yet to see this assessment.

ALL the major processors in the UK already use electronic stunning equipment, to stun or kill, prior to cooking and processing of crustacea. None of the main retailers (supermarkets) have sold live crustacean shellfish for many years

Consequently, the main impact of this guidance will be felt in small scale retail shops (fishmongers) and in the hospitality and catering sector.

The SAGB remains available for advice, help and support on this issue and has negotiated significant discounts on stunning equipment for its members.