

**Question for written answer E-010052/2010  
to the Commission**

Rule 117

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Subject: Castration of piglets in the EU

It is estimated that in the EU 80% of male piglets are castrated (around 100 million per annum). It is not performed for medical reasons but in order to prevent meat from developing the odour known as 'boar taint'.

Commission Directive 2001/93/EC prohibits all procedures carried out for other than therapeutic or diagnostic purposes or carried out for the identification of the pigs in accordance with relevant legislation and resulting in damage to or the loss of a sensitive part of the body or the alteration of bone structure, with the exception of castration of male pigs by other means than tearing of tissues.

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) stated in a report as long ago as 2004 that chemical castration of male piglets could not be performed without tearing tissues, such as the spermatic cord (gubernaculum testis). According to the EFSA, Directive 2001/93/EC is widely ignored in this regard.

The EFSA states that castration is always painful to piglets, and observes that the age limit of seven days up to which piglets may be castrated, pursuant to Directive 2001/93/EC, does not mean that newly born piglets feel less pain than older ones. Similarly, Finland's Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry states in a memorandum of 5 November 2010 that 'the measure is painful to the piglet, irrespective of whether the spermatic ducts are severed using a clamp or knife or by hand. Castration takes time, harms piglets' welfare and in the opinion of some producers is unpleasant. Castration without a local or general anaesthetic causes pain and stress to piglets, and they also feel pain after the procedure has been performed unless pain-killers are administered to them.'

It is not essential to castrate piglets using painful methods. In Britain and Ireland, for example, male piglets are not castrated, in Norway castration is permitted only under local anaesthetic administered by a vet and in Australia most male piglets are given an injection which prevents the development of the testes. Yet in Finland, for instance, nearly 40% of piglets are castrated by tearing out their testes without any form of pain relief or anaesthesia.

What will the Commission do to ensure that piglets in the EU are not caused unnecessary suffering by castration?