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Another UK supermarket chain makes shrimp sourcing commitments regarding eyestalk ablation and electrical stunning

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By Responsible Seafood Advocate

Co-op commits to strict animal welfare standards for its farmed shrimp supplies

The Co-op, one of Britain's largest cooperative supermarket chains, will require that its shrimp suppliers end the practice of eyestalk ablation in their hatcheries and to introduce electrical stunning at harvest sites by the end of 2027.

The decision, aimed at improving animal welfare standards in aquaculture, followed discussions with the International Council for Animal Welfare (ICAW) and the Aquatic Life Institute (ALI), as well as mounting public attention over the treatment of crustaceans in the seafood industry.

"This is an important commitment that could set new standards in the industry," said Jonas Becker, head of invertebrate welfare policy at ICAW. "These prawns will no longer have their eyes cut off, and instead of slowly suffocating to death, the electrical stunning will render them unconscious before



The Co-op, one of Britain's largest cooperative supermarket chains, has taken an official stance on the practice of eyestalk ablation in farmed shrimp. Photo by [Viet Chi Go](https://www.pexels.com/photo/shrimp-in-close-up-16521533/) (<https://www.pexels.com/photo/shrimp-in-close-up-16521533/>).

slaughter.”

Co-op has been gradually eliminating eyestalk ablation from its shrimp supply chain over several years. According to the company's assessments, the proportion of shrimp that the company sourced from non-ablated females rose from 71 percent in 2022 to more than 82 percent in 2023, reaching 100 percent this year.

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This progression reflects Co-op's ongoing efforts to align its sourcing practices with higher animal welfare standards. Co-op had already set the groundwork for banning the suffocation of shrimp in its animal welfare standards, which state that “all our animals are humanely stunned prior to slaughter.”

The decision to implement electrical stunning follows criticism of the industry's common practice of submerging shrimp in ice sludge, which has been deemed ineffective and can leave many shrimp to suffocate while still fully conscious.

"At Co-op, we are committed to continuously improving animal welfare standards, and all our fresh and frozen prawns, including where used as an ingredient, are 100% ablation free and we will implement electrical stunning across our entire prawn supply chain by 2027," said a spokesperson for Co-op. "Support from organizations such as Aquatic Life Institute has been invaluable, and we're proud to be making this change," said a spokesperson for Co-op.

Co-op's commitment signals a broader shift toward more humane practices in shrimp farming. UK retailers Tesco, Sainsbury's, Marks & Spencer, Ocado and Waitrose have already publicly committed to phase out both eyestalk ablation and introduce electrical stunning.

"This shift highlights the business case for improving aquatic animal welfare – meeting sustainability goals, reducing reputational risks and staying ahead of regulatory and market trends," said Cecilia Valenza, corporate engagement lead at ALI. "This is not just a Co-op success – this is a step toward industry-wide reform, encouraging other companies to adopt similar commitments. We urge other retailers to follow Co-op's lead by committing to phasing out eyestalk ablation and implementing humane slaughter methods."

Co-op sells an estimated 23 million shrimp annually, according to industry data analyzed by the International Council for Animal Welfare. Scientific research using **the Welfare Footprint methodology** (<https://osf.io/4qr8k/>) estimates that eliminating eyestalk ablation spares each shrimp three hours of pain. Public opinion also reflects concern over shrimp welfare – a 2023 survey found that many British consumers consider the common slaughter method of suffocation in ice sludge to be "a big problem."

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