

# MEAT MATTERS



## UNISON NEWSLETTER FOR MEAT HYGIENE INSPECTORS IN SCOTLAND

### Privatisation fears for Food Standards Agency in Scotland

- A Review into the Food Standards Agency (FSA) in Scotland is threatening the ability of the Meat Hygiene Service in Scotland to ensure the safety of meat products. Among the options being discussed in the Review are a separate meat inspection service – either government or private, the service being devolved back to local authorities, integrated with other services or wholly privatised. The review panel says that the status quo is not an option.
- UNISON believes the Meat Hygiene Service must remain state controlled and be autonomous from the food industry.
- The current UK wide FSA was set up to deal with national crises in the industry – the E-coli outbreak in Wishaw and BSE. Scotland has a poor history of food safety – any new body must protect the public – not serve industry. To ensure this it must be a wholly and directly provided state service.
- The Review is due to report in February and be implemented in April 2012. Normally the Scottish Government would issue a wide three-month consultation, followed by legislation to bring any changes into being. This timescale does not allow for proper consultation with members of the public. No Scottish Parliament committee will be allowed the time to scrutinise the proposals.

### SCUDAMORE REVIEW

Since July last year, UK's former chief vet, Jim Scudamore has been chairing a Scottish Government review on the future delivery of food standards in Scotland.

This follows the UK Government's decision in 2010 to absorb some of the policy areas overseen in England by the UK Food Standards Agency (FSA), back into Whitehall departments.

The Review panel is examining the feasibility of establishing a dedicated Scottish FSA, and also the merits of establishing a standalone meat inspection delivery service in Scotland.

The Panel consists of: Prof Jim Scudamore, Sue Davis from Which?, Professor Mac Johnston, Alistair Donaldson and Pam Whittle, CBE.

The report is to be finished by February 2012 and go to Minister with a view to implementing it in April 2012.

### TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Panel has to report on the merits of creating a separate body in Scotland to perform the functions carried out at present by the Food Standards Agency in Scotland, including Meat Inspection functions by February 2012

With specific reference to the Meat Inspection Services it has:

- To identify and evaluate alternative delivery options for meat inspection to be undertaken in Scotland in a more efficient and cost effective manner than the current GB wide model.
- Maintain the current levels of compliance with public and animal health statutory controls, whilst being risk based and proportionate.
- To consider the case for merging meat inspection delivery in Scotland with other food inspection services (e.g. egg production/processing and hygiene controls in retail premises).

## UNISON ACTION

UNISON Scotland wrote to the Public Health Minister, Michael Mathieson early in July, asking for more details of the Review and more specifically, how we could get involved in the discussions, either in writing or by meeting with the panel in person. We received an e-mail from the Minister in August, giving us no further information than we already knew about the review without mentioning how we could become involved.

The minutes of the first meeting held in July eventually appeared on the website in November, along with the terms of Reference. The Minutes of the September, October and November meetings were eventually put on the site in January 2012.

## UNISON SUBMISSION AND MEETING WITH THE REVIEW PANEL

Graham Cross, the National Convenor, wrote a response to the Review Group in which the main points were that any changes must:

- Ensure that the public are protected and not just serve industry
- Be a wholly and directly provided state service
- Be adequately resourced
- Ensure the service is properly independent of the industry
- Reintroduce the clean livestock policy
- Ensure that Vets are directly employed by whoever runs the meat inspection regime and properly trained - (We are opposed to agency Vets who are often not properly trained)

MHIs would be happy to expand their role into shellfish, eggs, and butchers premises. However, they do not wish to include milk inspections. The response also stressed that UNISON believes the FSA should remain a UK wide service.

On 12 December, Simon Watson, National Officer, Graham Cross, National Convenor and Graeme Anderson, Scottish Convenor attended a meeting with the Review Panel. The panel asked them how they would wish the service to be run, and they expanded on their points in the response above. Again they stressed that the service must be state run, and retain autonomy from pressure from the food industry.

## RELEVANT ISSUES

Scotland has a poor history of food safety – as witnessed by the Wishaw e-Coli and the BSE outbreaks.

Scotland needs better inspection – not worse. A clean livestock policy is essential to protect the public. The current level of “dirty” animals entering abattoirs is far too high. The clean livestock policy should be reinstated.

The Panel are so far placing a high emphasis on cost effectiveness – not public protection. The panel clearly believes there are efficiency savings to be made.

UNISON is concerned at the future for our members – if the status quo not an option, what will happen to you? The panel is looking at TUPE transferring staff. To where? We don't know and will have very little time to make sure any transition goes smoothly.

Meat Hygiene Inspectors and Official Veterinarians (OVs) should be directly employed to enhance protection for the public and be properly trained. The Review body should listen to the view of our Meat Hygiene Inspectors.

Privatisation is one of the issues being considered, along with splitting Meat Hygiene from Nutrition and Labelling, integrating with other bodies, i.e. fish, milk and eggs.

The timescale for any changes is very short. The Panel is to report in February and be implemented by April this year. The report will go to the Minister for Public Health, Michael Matheson, MSP, who will decide its fate. No Scottish Parliament Committee, the Parliament itself or the public will be allowed proper time to scrutinise the Review's recommendations. Any proposals could be implemented by an administrative procedure, a Scottish Statutory Instrument (SSI).

## WHAT CAN WE DO?

- Write to your MSP – Model Letter enclosed and the link below tells you who your MSPs are – don't forget you have Regional List MSPs as well.

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/msps/177.aspx>

- Ask your Manager what is happening

- Make sure all your colleagues including contract vets and contract meat inspectors are UNISON members. They can join online at [www.unison.org.uk](http://www.unison.org.uk) or contact the Resource Centre on 01224 620624 for an application form.

**Further Information:** <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Health/health/Health/FSAS>  
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Health/health/Health/Reference>  
<http://www.unison.org.uk/localgov/meathygiene/> (UNISON Response)

**Contact:**

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Dear

MSP

## **SCUDAMORE REVIEW OF THE FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY IN SCOTLAND**

As a UNISON member I wish to express my concern at the possibility of the privatisation of the Food Standards Agency in Scotland, including the Meat Hygiene Service

The Scudamore Review, set up by Michael Matheson, Minister for Public Health, is currently assessing the future delivery of food standards in Scotland, following the UK Government's decision in 2010 to absorb some of the policy areas overseen in England by the UK Food Standards Agency (FSA), back into Whitehall departments. The Review panel is examining the feasibility of establishing a dedicated Scottish FSA, and also the merits of establishing a standalone meat inspection delivery service in Scotland.

The Panel so far has stated that the status quo for the Meat Hygiene Service is not an option. Privatisation is one of the issues being considered, along with the establishment of an independent FSA in Scotland, including meat inspection; making meat inspection a separate entity run by the Scottish Government or privately; or totally privatising the Scottish Food Standards Agency and integrating with other inspection bodies, i.e. fish, milk and eggs.

Scottish meat products are quite rightly praised throughout the world, but Scotland has poor history of food safety – as witnessed by the e-Coli outbreak in Wishaw and the BSE incidents. I feel that Scotland needs better inspection – not worse. A clean livestock policy is essential to protect the public. The current level of “dirty” animals entering abattoirs is far too high. The clean livestock policy should be reinstated.

The Review so far places a high emphasis on the cost effectiveness of any new service – not public protection. The panel clearly believes there are efficiency savings to be made in Meat Hygiene.

The Scottish Government set up a website to allow access to various documents pertinent to the review, as these became available, such as the Terms of Reference and the Minutes of the various meetings. Unfortunately, information about the review has been very slow to appear on the website. For example, the Minutes of the July Meeting were posted at the end of October and those of the September meeting were posted early January, only after UNISON chased them up, followed quickly by those for October and November in mid January. UNISON was belatedly invited to meet the Review Panel in December and submit a brief statement. No minutes are so far available.

The report is due to be published this month and any proposals implemented in April 2012. Despite repeatedly asking, UNISON does not know how the Minister intends to implement the proposals. There will clearly not be any time for a Scottish Government consultation paper or a Bill to go through Parliament and we are extremely concerned that any proposals will be brought in by administrative means, e.g. via a Scottish Statutory Instrument (SSI).

I urge you to investigate this situation as a matter of urgency to ensure that any proposals are properly scrutinised by the Scottish Parliament and ensure that the Meat Hygiene Service remains within state control so that it can be seen to serve the protection of the public and not the desires of the food industry.

Yours sincerely