Food (Scotland) Bill

Scottish Association of Meat Wholesalers

These are the views of the Scottish Association of Meat Wholesalers, which represents the red meat slaughtering and processing sector in Scotland. Our members are responsible for the slaughter of 99% of the cattle, sheep and pigs processed in Scotland and we are regulated by the Food Standards Agency. We advocated the establishment of a stand-alone meat inspection service in Scotland and this was implemented by the Scottish Government in 2013 in response to the enquiry conducted by Professor Scudamore.

Our response to the questions posed in the call for evidence is below:

THE MERITS OF CREATING A STAND ALONE BODY RATHER THAN ENHANCING THE CURRENT FSA SCOTLAND ARRANGEMENTS

Scotland has different needs and priorities for food, health, diet and nutrition than the rest of the UK. It has different problems which require tailored solutions unlikely to be fully understood or appreciated by the FSA in London who would still ultimately manage an enhanced FSA Scotland. Experience on meat hygiene issues is that the FSA UK is distant and disengaged when it comes to Scottish issues. Since the establishment of the stand-alone Scottish meat body in Aberdeen last year we have developed a partnership approach which has yielded mutual benefits to consumers and industry through better understanding and shorter lines of communication.

THE SCOPE AND OBJECTIVE FUNCTIONS OF THE FSS INCLUDING WHETHER AND HOW THEY COULD SUPPORT SCOTLAND’S SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The delivery of Food Safety and Food Standards currently involves the FSA and Scottish local authorities carrying out specific duties across the sector. A Scottish body would be better placed to ensure a co-ordinate approach giving better scrutiny to the areas most likely to be at risk. This would result in better communication and co-ordination, better targeting and better use of resources all to the benefit of consumer protection. More focus could be given to the sustainability of the meat industry and processing facilities, including those in remote and island areas. Food inspectors could be trained in other kinds of official control duties, leading to a better organised, more effective and efficient work force. Cost savings would result from such organisation.

THE PROPOSED ADMINISTRATIVE AND GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE FSS

We agree that FSS should have operational independence but that it is correct that the Scottish Government should be able to influence FSS transparently in matters of public interest. The FSS should be governed by a board of suitably qualified directors.
THE PROPOSED POWERS OF THE FSS

Food safety and food standards are crucial to consumer protection. Breaches of safety and standards can result in very serious consequences so it is right that FSS should have sufficiently strong powers to investigate potential or suspected non-compliance.

THE LIKELY EFFICACY OF THE NEW PROVISIONS RELATED TO FOOD INFORMATION TO PREVENT FOOD FRAUD

Experience of the horsemeat scandal has highlighted where there are potential weaknesses in the supply chain and where there is potential to exploit these. The additional powers that would be available to the FSS would enable them to investigate future incidents more quickly and effectively. Co-ordination with local authorities and industry would be better, and information more accessible. Improved surveillance, intelligence gathering, research and communication would result in Scotland and the UK. The FSS could also have a more prominent role in international surveillance and collaboration.

THE PROVISIONS SET OUT IN THE BILL FOR NON–COMPLIANCE WITH FOOD SAFETY AND STANDARDS

The Bill will rectify a significant deficiency in current provisions regarding food standards by enabling the seizure and detention of food pending further investigation and the seizure and destruction of non–compliant food or labelling. Seizure and destruction powers already exist in relation to food safety. The creation of new non–criminal enforcement sanctions is also helpful.

Scottish Association of Meat Wholesalers
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