Food (Scotland) Bill

Late Submission - Quality Meat Scotland

Areas on which the Committee invites comments:

1. The merits of creating a stand-alone body rather than enhancing the current FSA Scotland arrangements.
   Comment
   Quality Meat Scotland (QMS) fully supports the creation of a dedicated food body for Scotland, which will develop and implement policy on food safety standards. This will clarify arrangements regarding responsibilities for nutrition and labelling. Given the horsemeat substitution fraud of early 2013, it is important that labelling and traceability throughout the supply chain are enforced effectively. This will be advantageous for Scottish consumers and the Scottish food industry in general.

2. The scope of the objectives and functions of the FSS, including whether and how they could support Scotland’s sustainable development.
   Comment
   QMS believes that a dedicated food body for Scotland will support the economic growth and development of our already successful Scottish food production and manufacturing sectors.

   It should be an objective of Food Standards Scotland (FSS) to provide guidance and advice to Scottish Government on the translation and implementation of European legislation into Scottish legislation.

3. The proposed administrative and governance arrangements for the FSS.
   Comment
   QMS supports FSS being at arms length from Scottish Ministers and that this arrangement will promote independence, transparency and consumer confidence.

   We have reservations that the minimum Board membership of 3 plus Chairman will provide sufficient breadth and depth and that consideration should be given to increasing this minimum requirement.

   The Bill does not specifically cover attributes required of Board members and we would expect membership (at any given time) to be comprised of a suitably broad range of governance skills, together with relevant food industry knowledge and experience.

4. The proposed powers of the FSS.
   Comment
   QMS understands the rationale behind broad drafting of the Bill, but considers it essential that FSS exercises its powers in a way that is proportionate to its remit.
5. The likely efficacy of the new provisions related to food information to prevent food fraud (such as the recent horsemeat incident).

Comment
QMS supports all measures to minimise food fraud, as well as the introduction of powers to seize and detain food which is safe but does not meet food information requirements e.g. non-compliant labelling.

We also welcome the creation of a statutory offence of failure by a food business operator to report breaches of food information law. This provides an early warning mechanism and promotes a culture of increased awareness of food fraud.

We also support the Section 30(5) public interest test in relation to the publication and disclosure of advice and information by FSS.

We recommend that FSS is sufficiently resourced to deliver these provisions effectively.

6. The provisions set out in the Bill for non-compliance with food safety and standards.

Comment
QMS believes the proposed range of new administrative sanctions (fixed penalty and compliance notices) should reduce the caseload burden on Scottish courts. However we are concerned that the level of penalties (sums and fines) is both proportionate and sufficient to achieve a balance between deterring the determined or deliberate fraudster and a single incidence of non-compliance.

7. Any other comments on the Bill that relate to areas not covered above.

Comment
QMS welcomes the fact that encouraging good nutrition and a healthy balanced diet is clearly identified as one of the main objectives of Food Standards Scotland. Section 1 (b) states an objective of “to improve the extent to which members of the public have diets which are conducive to good health.”

This is in line with the QMS health and education strategy and activities to improve understanding of the importance of a healthy, balanced diet as well as the role red plays in achieving that. Quality Meat Scotland has a dietitian and a nutritionist on its staff who deliver a programme of activity including: over 150 demonstrations in schools annually; a meat voucher scheme to ensure schools can afford to purchase quality meat for cooking lessons; awards focused on encouraging the use of quality, local produce; a sports/healthy activity bursary to encourage healthy activity; a young chef bursary; support of Champions in Schools (where one of the visits by high profile athletes is focused on the importance of nutrition); support of Street Soccer Scotland (including the launch of a new “Eat Well. Play Well” publication); strong presence at events such as the Royal Highland Show.
where we cook with 1000 children. We also work closely with organisations such as the Royal Highland Education Trust.

However, we note with concern that there appears to be very little detail in support of this objective in the remainder of the draft bill and very little indication of how FSS will deliver this important objective.