



Heather Hancock
Chair
Food Standards Agency
Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6NH

13 September 2017

Dear Heather

ADVICE FROM THE NORTHERN IRELAND FOOD ADVISORY COMMITTEE TO THE BOARD OF THE FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY ON ISSUES ADDRESSED BY THE COMMITTEE: SEPTEMBER 2017

The key role of the Food Advisory Committees is to advise the Board of the Food Standards Agency. To that end, the Northern Ireland Food Advisory Committee (NIFAC) has given its consideration to the following papers, due to be discussed at the upcoming meeting of the FSA Board:

- Animal Welfare
- Exiting the EU
- Annual update to the FSA Board from the Director for NI, People and Organisational Change.

The Animal Welfare Update was presented to NIFAC by the FSA's Animal Welfare & Delivery Assurance Lead, Julia Williams and Rod Ainsworth, the FSA's Director of Regulatory and Legal Strategy presented the paper on Exiting the EU. Both attended the meeting by teleconference and I am grateful to them for assisting the Committee in their consideration of these papers. Maria Jennings, the Director for NI, People and Organisational Change, introduced the item on her annual report to the Board.

NIFAC also heard a presentation on the work carried out by the FSA in Northern Ireland on shellfish official controls from Debbie Sharpe of the FSA in NI's Food

10 A-C Clarendon Road
Belfast BT1 3BG
T 028 9041 7700
E infosani@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

FOOD HYGIEN RATING

food.gov.uk/ratings



Hygiene Policy & Operations team and I would also like to thank her for presenting this item.

NIFAC held their open meeting at the Lough Neagh Eel Fishermen's Cooperative in Toome, County Antrim. NIFAC were given a tour of the impressive site to see the processing of the brown eels from the lough as well as some of the scale fish also processed there. Members heard about the measures and processes put in place by the fishery to ensure quality, welfare, yield and conservation of the eel stocks. NIFAC were also given an overview of the significant challenges faced by the fishery from both the UK's exit from the EU and the global decline in eel stocks. This was a highly informative visit, giving Committee members an insight into the issues faced within a large scale inland fishery.

NIFAC's comments on the substantive items included on the open meeting agenda are included below:

Shellfish Official Controls

Debbie Sharpe of the FSA in NI's Food Hygiene Policy & Operations team delivered a presentation on the work carried in NI around shellfish controls.

This was a very interesting presentation on a subject that NIFAC has not previously heard a great deal about. NIFAC members recognised that, while collection by individuals for personal consumption is generally permitted in most areas, we are dependent on reporting for large scale collection by unregistered individuals or groups. It was reassuring to hear that the FSA in NI's Food Fraud Liaison Officer continues to liaise with the Gangmasters' Association to counter coordinated efforts to bypass regulation.

It was suggested by Committee members that the UK's exit from the EU will present a challenge for the regulating of beds in the two cross-border loughs: Carlingford and Foyle. It is unclear exactly where an eventual border will fall across the waters of these loughs as the current situation is already contested between the UK and the Republic of Ireland. This could create opportunities for fishermen to land their catch on whichever side of the lough proves more commercially advantageous irrespective of where in the lough they came from.

NIFAC members also urged consideration to the impact of microplastics on filter feeding bivalve molluscs and the potential impact on the food chain.

Animal Welfare

Julia Williams, the FSA's Animal Welfare & Delivery Assurance Lead joined the meeting by teleconference to present a paper due to be discussed at the FSA Board

meeting on activities in England and Wales on the FSA “Deter, Prevent, Detect, Enforce” programme to drive improvements in animal welfare standards in slaughterhouses.

NIFAC members were pleased to hear that there does not appear to be to be any slow-down in the voluntary adoption of CCTV prior to mandation.

There was also support from Committee members for the collaboration that had been demonstrated with the poultry sector and the approach proposed in the paper for clarifying the funding position in relation to the cost of delivering animal welfare policy in slaughterhouses in England and Wales, in advance of EU exit. It was suggested a good starting point could be to look at the costs to DAERA for implementing their policy in NI and scaling that up to give an approximate figure for funding in England and Wales.

Exiting the EU

The FSA’s Director of Regulatory and Legal Strategy Rod Ainsworth joined the meeting by teleconference to present a paper due to be considered at the upcoming Board meeting on the UK’s exit from the EU.

NIFAC members were pleased to see a paper on this subject being brought to the FSA Board for discussion in Open Session as it is an issue the will impact greatly on the work of the FSA.

It was noted that where a border exists between two jurisdictions with differing trading arrangements, differentials are established that will encourage food crime that can exploit these differences. It was welcomed that the FSA is seeking an expansion of its powers in relation to tackling food crime but it would be advised to seek the resources necessary for implementing these powers prior to getting them to avoid a situation where the FSA is granted the powers but not the resource.

It was noted that a high proportion of the FSA’s veterinary staff are non-UK, EU citizens. While members were pleased to hear anecdotally that there does not seem to be evidence of these staff seeking to leave the UK, an observer from the British Veterinary Association mentioned that they had seen a slowing of applications from other EU member states since last year. The idea of the establishment of a contingency fund offering enticements for qualified vets to work for the FSA was welcomed.

Annual update to the FSA Board from the Director for NI, People and Organisational Change.

Maria Jennings, the FSA's Director for Northern Ireland, People and Organisational Change updated members on the content of her annual report to the Board for their upcoming visit to Northern Ireland.

NIFAC members considered this to be an excellent summary of the work carried out throughout the year but considered that it could have been even stronger in honouring the work done by the FSA's NI staff. This was considered to be especially true in the area of dietary health where Northern Ireland remains the only jurisdiction where the FSA retains responsibility and carries it out in an exemplary manner. A mention of the Menucal scheme was also suggested.

I am copying this letter to the Board Secretariat and to the Chief Executive.



pp. Colm McKenna (approved by Colm McKenna and signed in his absence)
Chair, Northern Ireland Food Advisory Committee