

## General Secretary's Report



Hello to you all.

I am extremely gratified to be able start this report with some good news!

### A success and a spectacular success.

The overarching piece of legislation that covers every aspect of food production within the EU is reviewed by the EU every ten years or so. Sometimes the review is delayed due to the bureaucratic burden of creating new legislation, and this has been the case in this last round. Currently regulation 2004/882 is the legislation in place, though this is due to be replaced by regulation 2017/625. This legislation is important to the Association because all of the legislation pertaining to the production of meat arise from it; 852/2004 – primary production, 853/2004 hygienic processing and 854/2004 – official controls, including the specifics of meat inspection. Clearly, any changes to this legislation could impact greatly on what we do.

Your Association, via its involvement with the EWFC (European Working community for Food and Consumer Protection) has kept a very close watching brief on the development of regulation 2017/625, particularly with regards to the minutiae of the wording, and as to exactly what was

included or omitted in both the delegated and implementing acts within the legislation.

This is important because what is included in implementing acts can be put in place by the Commission (after consultation with ‘expert groups’) but the EU council and Parliament do not have any input.

Delegated acts can be challenged by EU Council and Parliament, and you may remember that the change to the inspection procedures in pigs went to a full plenary vote in the EU Parliament because the proposed changes to the legislation were challenged, following some very hard lobbying by the EWFC. Although the challenge was un-successful and the changes were voted through (Parliament voted against the recommendations of their own ENVI Committee) there are those that believe this challenge has caused the EU commission to have paused for thought in the proposals to follow EFSA's (European Food Safety Authority) recommendations to drop the post mortem inspection of broiler chickens altogether.

To the AMI way of thinking, this is never made any sense and we cannot understand why this line of thinking by EFSA would ever have been considered in the first place, other than purely as a money saving exercise. So we can consider that a success in the first instance.

Through our involvement with EWFC, we have lobbied MEPs, engaged with various rapporteurs and have united various EU political parties that generally do not support each other, in supporting our thinking that the consumer must be

foremost in our thinking and theirs. We have managed to persuade the legislators to retain the word 'wholesome', among others, in the new draft of 625. Now this may not seem to be a very great deal to the un-informed, but it means that the ability to reject meat that is unfit through parasites and conditions that might not actually be detrimental to human health if consumed is also retained. It means that MHIs will continue to be able to safeguard not just the confidence of the consumer, but also the reputation of the industry that we are all so passionate about. I don't believe that there is an inspector around who would argue against this.

As part of the review and reform of the legislation, regulation 2004/854 will be repealed and replaced with a new regulation. Again, the EWFC have lobbied extremely hard to ensure that the level of official controls is not 'watered down', and I am again, extremely gratified to be able to report that the new regulation will very similar to that which already exists. The requirement for inspection to be carried out by independent parties, (rather than industry carrying out inspection in red meat) is retained, and the training requirements for official auxiliaries remains the same. There are one or two important changes; the official auxiliaries in plant look likely to be able to carry out ante-mortem inspection at some point in the future, in much the same vein as we have seen in the UK in times gone by i.e. assisting the OV in the ante-mortem inspection of young, prime stock and getting put to one side those animals that require further veterinary AM inspection or clinical examination.

There is also scope for plant staff to be able to carry out some tasks such as

sampling procedures. I have to state here that I am not so concerned by this as much as some of my colleagues in the AMI Executive. Do we not already have plant staff routinely carrying out salmonella sampling in swine? And Trichinella sampling too? My assumption is that these are the kind of tasks alluded to, and that tasks such as RIM (Residues In Meat) sampling, where a positive result could potentially lead to formal enforcement action or prosecution, will remain within the jurisdiction of the competent authority. This is only my personal opinion, but it makes sense to me.

The very fact that there is to be virtually no change to the legislation as we recognise in practicality, in these times of apparent desire for de-regulation and cost savings, is to my mind not just a success, but a spectacular success at that.

Although it would be far too grand a statement to declare this as an AMI success, it is an EWFC success, and the AMI have been very influential within that organisation. I am proud to have played my part in this work and would wish to commend the members of the AMI executive for their input over the past months and years, some by their input directly to the EWFC board, but all Council for their input when I have brought discussion points back for their consideration.

It was decided by AMI Council some years back that the best place to take the good fight was directly to the heart of the EU itself, and I believe that this decision has now paid dividends. Rest assured that the work with EWFC will continue, most likely even post Brexit, such is the gravitas given to the knowledge and input provided by the Association of Meat Inspectors.

## **Professional Recognition**

The Association met with the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons on the 27<sup>th</sup> February, to further discuss the progression towards a formal professional recognition of meat hygiene inspectors.

Following a change to the RCVS Royal Charter, and a decision by RCVS at their AGM in July, ‘allied professionals’ will be able to achieve ‘associate status’ at some point in the future.

The first point of discussion was ‘does the role carried out by MHIs fit the criteria decided by RCVS Council, to make it eligible to come under the RCVS ‘umbrella’? The answer was pre-empted by RCVS who were unanimous in their opinion that it fitted very well, and that no further discussion was required.

There are two models under discussion;

### **Accreditation Model;**

This is the model that would allow the AMI to provide its own administration in much the same way as it does now, and it would have to cover costs involved with any disciplinary panels, training, CPD etc. This model comes with an initial application fee and an ongoing yearly renewal cost. The AMI would have to have enough capital in reserve or insurance in place to cover unexpected eventualities such as court costs, disciplinary panels etc. Basically, the AMI would shoulder all additional costs over and above the ongoing annual renewal fee. RCVS would ‘audit’ at regular intervals (every two years suggested), again at a cost to the AMI.

### **Full Regulation Model;**

Essentially this would involve the RCVS regulating individuals, with RCVS

administering to the register, disciplinary procedures, training, CPD etc. and this would also come at a cost; initial setup costs, ongoing annual subscriptions that are likely to be more than the minimal costs the Association currently charges.

Questions were also asked re the qualifications necessary to become a member of the AMI. RCVS were provided with a copy of the AMI rulebook which sets this out quite clearly, and this appeared to be satisfactory.

‘Regulation comes at a cost’.

RCVS made clear that regulation must be self – financing, (to draw on the funds paid in by RCVS members would be unlawful).

There could also be a potential conflict of interest if a body was both regulatory and representative. When informed that the AMI consisted of two parts; AMI GB Ltd and AMI Trust, RCVS suggested that with a little ‘tweaking’ that this should be easily achievable.

RCVS suggested that the AMI should seek to define a ‘purpose’ for a formal Professional Recognition and indicated that future opportunities, particularly post Brexit could be ‘marked’ (export certification, cold stores etc.). The AMI take this to mean that, once professional status is established, a ‘trust’ is also established which could lead to further opportunities, following additional training. We informed the meeting that MHIs have in the past proved to be ‘hungry’ for learning opportunities and have stepped up to meet all the challenges that have come their way since the BSE crisis.

The issue of costs was a major discussion point, as was expected when discussed at AMI council.

It was suggested that this could depend somewhat on just how many other bodies would seek to come under the RCVS umbrella. E.g. if a separate disciplinary panel needed to be created (and funded) then it might be possible to use the same lay-people to cover all the bodies, inserting the relevant expertise for each body as and when necessary. So if an MHI was to appear before the panel, then MHIs would be represented on the panel for that one particular hearing.

RCVS suggested that AMI 'consulted' with FSA in the move towards professional recognition.

The AMI suggested to RCVS that the Veterinary Public Health Association should also be involved in this process.

In closing discussions, RCVS informed AMI that the move towards professional recognition was a 'process' and that AMI are very well placed and are perhaps, significantly further along in this process than some of the other groups / bodies that have requested consideration, and they commended us for this.

No timetable is in place at this point in time, though it was suggested that, with RCVS AGMs being held in July of each year, that no significant decisions were likely to be possible until July 2019.

This whole topic of professional recognition will be on the agenda for discussion at the AMI AGM in April.

### **Annual General Meeting**

The Annual General Meeting 2018 returns to the Aztec West Hotel, Bristol, just off

the intersection of the M4 and M5 motorways.

The meeting will be held on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> April and will be scheduled to start at 10:30. If you wish to attend, please take the time to drop me a line so that I can ensure that everybody is fed and watered.

### **And finally.....**

It is with some regret that I wish to inform the membership of the Association of Meat inspectors that this is likely to be my last report for the Meat Hygienist, as it is my intention to step back from the role of General Secretary to the AMI at the Annual General Meeting in April.

By that time, I will have been in the role for some twelve years and I feel that the time is right for someone else to take the reins, bring in some fresh ideas and provide the time, drive and impetus that the Association and its members needs and deserves, something that I have endeavoured to do all that time, but that interests outside the profession and subsequent time constraints are now making increasingly difficult.

I will not be simply 'disappearing in to the ether however; I have stated my willingness to stay involved with the Executive, possibly by way of co-option, for at least twelve months so that I can afford the new General Secretary, whoever he or she may be, the same sort of guidance and advice that I received when I took the on the role in 2006. This should help facilitate a smooth transition and for my part, it should allow me to see through any 'works in progress' to their completion. However, any decisions along these lines will be down to the AGM to decide, in lines with the protocols that I

have been a bit of a stickler for all this time.

I have been privileged to have been involved in some remarkable work during my time as General Secretary, not least the bold moves towards earning a formal professional recognition for MHIs in their own right, and the spectacular successes re regulation 625 via the AMI involvement with EWFC. I acknowledge that a lot of opportunities have been afforded to me during my time as General Secretary, and I am ever grateful for these. I hope that I have represented the Association with some degree of professionalism through the good times and the not so good.

It has been my honour and my privilege to have represented the AMI and its membership since 2006, and to have met so many of you over that time, and I am confident that you will show the new General Secretary the same level of support that I have enjoyed.

I will be staying on as a Trustee, so I will still be in regular contact with my fellow Trustees and the Council, and hopefully continue to catch up with the membership in times to come.

My thanks to you all, and, as always, keep up the good work.

Regards,

Ian Robinson

General Secretary AMI