

General Secretary's Report



Hello to you all,

Seminar 2011

It is my very great pleasure to be able to report that Seminar 2011 was another resounding success, being fully booked some two weeks before the event and with further enquiries being invited to join a standby list in case of cancellations. However, there were none so I can only offer my sincere apologies to those who were unsuccessful and assure them that we will be seeking a larger venue for Seminar 2012.

Delegates enjoyed talks on Ante-Mortem Inspection, TB, Campylobacter, Meat Controls, The Burden of Intestinal Disease, Food Chain Information, Post Mortem Data and the Slaughter of Exotic/Minority Species.

Feedback has been very positive with every delegate who took the time to complete the sheet provided indicating that they would recommend the Seminar to their colleagues.

Certificates of attendance were issued this year, and comments received indicated that this was particularly well received.

The decision has already been taken to run a Seminar in 2012 and if anyone has a burning subject matter that they would like to see

included then please, drop me a line and discuss your thoughts with me. Now is exactly the time for your input.

Professionalism

With the continued progress of the Association towards achieving professional recognition, one subject that keeps cropping up is that of "professionalism", and I thought that this would be a timely moment to put my thoughts down, and to invite your comments on the matter.

All this stems from the fact that ultimately, all MHI's subscribing to the new register will be required to abide by a newly set up code of conduct, which will set out certain expectations and practices that the MHI will be expected to adhere to.

Conduct in Plant

Of course the real crux of professionalism lies in the day to day duties and an individual's conduct in the course of carrying out those duties.

I think that we all know exactly what that means if we are honest about it. The first thing is that no MHI should be performing FBO duties such as trimming of contamination, processing tasks or the rectification of carcasses. All MHI's should appreciate that they compromise their position and leave themselves liable if they do carry out this work and devalue a carcass or "take it out of specification" and render the carcass unmarketable or difficult to sell. By detaining the carcass and insisting that plant operatives perform the rectification, albeit under their direction, they would not place themselves in a position of compromise in the

first place. If any FBO is not acceptant of their decision then the carcass would remain unhealth marked and thus unmarketable anyway. It would however still remain the FBO's decision, and there is an appeal procedure in place should the FBO wish to move things in that direction.

There will be occasions when opinions differ (meat inspection sometimes being the subjective profession that it is) and the OV in plant might be of an opinion that differs from the MHI team (generalised oedema being one particular example that springs to mind). In such cases I would like to think that collective discussion would cause the team to arrive at a collective decision. But what to do if opinion differs such that this is not possible? Which line should the MHI adopt?

At this point it should be appreciated that the OV in plant is the person where ultimately the buck stops and whose decision should hold sway, and in such circumstances, MHI's should accede to the OV's decision.

However, I would ask of all OV's that in such circumstances, if you do overrule the decision of any MHI or indeed, team of MHI's, then please demonstrate the courage of your convictions and health mark the carcass yourself and not ask the MHI to compromise their own individual standards.

This exact subject provoked much discussion at seminar and every inspector who deigned to make comment stated the same thing; "I will not be pushed into health marking any carcass that in my personal opinion is unfit for human consumption".

I don't think that this is being unreasonable and by working in the manner suggested, both professions are demonstrating professional courtesy to the other.

Any further discussion can then take place in the confines of the OV/MHI office.

I would also suggest that accurate recording of post-mortem data should be mentioned in the sphere of "professionalism". In truth this is already pretty good and Eamon Watson confirmed this in his talk at Seminar about this subject. Apparently, the system in place throughout the UK is the envy of the rest of Europe and much of this is down to MHI's being diligent in their work and, at a local level, putting in place methods of recording on the line that are tailored to suit individual plants and circumstances. A touch of self congratulation by MHI's might be appropriate at this point!!!

Conduct Outside of Work

This is surely down to common sense and a matter of being a decent, productive member of society?

If you take the decision to get involved in criminality and you get caught, then you can surely expect this to reflect badly in the respect of your perceived professionalism?

And the same goes for so many other facets of life; drug taking, public disorder, drink driving, fraud, accepting bribes etc.

I recently heard one gentleman who is a member of the RCVS, and who also happens to a member of the Territorial Army state that if he were to get caught drink driving, then he could expect to be disciplined in three different ways; by the full force of the Law, the RCVS and to be court martialled to boot.

As he doesn't fancy the idea of ending up in Colchester he doesn't even entertain the idea of drink driving, or any other of the discrepancies mentioned.

It would also be relevant in slightly less obvious ways, and any member would be expected not to bring the profession into disrepute or to use their position for their own personal gain.

All common sense and I appreciate that I am trying to teach Granny to suck eggs by stating all this.

Continuing Professional Development

The requirements for CPD will be 45 hours averaged out over three years, so 2 working days per year is a pretty fair ball park figure.

By happy co-incidence, attending seminar and reading the four editions of The Meat Hygienist that are published each year will virtually cover the time required.

Dress Code

In days gone by, Meat Inspectors working for the Local Authorities were expected to wear a suit to work, be that going in to the office first or straight to plant, then change into overalls, complete their days inspection and then change back into a suit before leaving.

My own opinion is that this would undoubtedly create an enhanced image of professionalism and perhaps the relaxation of this standard is one of the reasons why the MHI today does not seem to garner the respect that was once so apparent.

Whether or not this is a practical suggestion is another matter entirely and, having seen the diabolical state of some facilities "provided" for inspectors, I would have to go on the record as saying that I would not be happy to wear my "best threads" to work in those circumstances. But just maybe by taking the lead on this matter it would coerce the FBO's in those plants to provide better facilities.

Covert Filming

On a much more serious note, I was recently asked if the AMI supported the BVA's call for the relevant authorities to be allowed to use the film obtained covertly by Animal Aid to prosecute those individuals allegedly caught abusing the animals in their care.

Well it is not my position to be able to make a call like that unilaterally, so I took it to Council for a collective opinion, the outcome of which is thus;

The AMI's opinion is that to allow such footage to be used in prosecution would only encourage further attempts to obtain similar footage, and in no way whatsoever could we condone trespass, covert filming or any other invasions of privacy, no matter how "noble" the motive might be. (I have seen the footage and the apparent abuses are nothing short of despicable and I understand that the individuals concerned have lost their position as a result).

However, where CCTV is correctly employed in plant, any such footage showing animal welfare abuses should be utilised to aid prosecution to the full extent of the law. We are already on record in advocating the voluntary use of CCTV in plant.

Further to this, the AMI would like to see the "fit and proper persons" part of the licence to be diligently applied as a further measure to prevent such dreadful abuses in the future.

MHI's in plant still have a role to play in safeguarding animal welfare and I know that you will all step up to the plate and be counted in this respect.

Keep up the good work.

Regards,

Ian Robinson