

## General Secretary's Report



Hello to you all,

I am happy to be able to report that the Association's 47<sup>th</sup> Annual Seminar, held at the new venue of the Sutton Bonington campus of the University of Nottingham, has been hailed as another great success, with feedback recognising the quality of the speakers and the relevance of the subject matter. We enjoyed talks on; The small abattoirs perspective on the modernisation of meat inspection, The Smallenberg Virus, Eartag Fraud, Meat Inspection in Spain, Bullying and Harassment, The diversification of the Inspectors Role and the new PATK regulations. We hope to bring you these presentations through these pages in the issues to come. On the Friday night delegates were challenged to a quiz on Pathology and animal health. I think it is fair to say that nobody got every question correct and that there were one or two surprises. After the quiz there was some discussion about the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) Opinion on the effectiveness of meat inspection with regards to pigs and poultry. Essentially,

the two reports state that current meat inspection systems fail to address the main food borne pathogens such as Campylobacteriosis, Salmonella spp, Yersinia Enterocolitica, Trichenella and Toxoplasma Gondii and that pathologies such as abscesses, tumours, other parasitic conditions to name but a few can be considered to be quality issues rather than public health issues. One delegate put it thus: "If it isn't going to kill you then it is merely a quality issue". This would mean that the incision of lymph nodes, palpation of organs etc is to all intents and purposes, pointless. EFSA even go as far as to recommend that the post-mortem inspection of poultry is dropped altogether. This could leave the door open for inspection to be handed to industry, at least in regards to quality issues and the role of the officials could be shifted to auditing, supervising etc. "There could be fewer but better jobs" is one quote that I have heard.

I sought an early opinion from some of the delegates at Seminar and it appeared that there were two distinct lines of thought;

- 1) That the AMI should fight these proposals all the way and if necessary, go down fighting as it wouldn't ultimately make a difference to the outcome (the point about the possibility of subsequently being marginalised didn't cut much ice with this particular group).

2) That change is inevitable and if embrace is too strong a phrase, then we should accept the fact that change is inevitable, work with the various authorities stay in the loop and retain a voice. At least then we might be able to push for such important values such as the retention of an independent service.

One thing is certain in that this is going to be the most fundamental review of meat inspection in decades and any change needs to happen for the right reasons i.e. not just short term financial reasons, cost cutting etc.

The Association would like to know your thoughts on this matter and you can either feedback through me or your divisional secretary.

### **POTSDAM GROUP**

Earlier this year, through our contacts in Europe, the Association learnt of a group called the POTSDAM Group. This group is made up of experts appointed to determine whether or not non member states are able to trade with the EU on an "equivalency basis".

This would include meat exported from the Antipodean countries such as New Zealand and Australia. The Association have concerns about the meat inspection systems being utilised in some plants in these countries so sought clarification from the FSA about the POTSDAM Group, and the effectiveness of the systems in place in New Zealand and Australia.

I wrote to the FSA directly;

*"The Association of Meat Inspectors has learnt of a group called the Potsdam*

*group that will be meeting in the near future to take the decision as to whether or not New Zealand will be allowed to trade with the EU on an "equivalency basis". Our understanding is that New Zealand now utilises plant employed meat inspectors to perform post-mortem inspection with a state employed Official Auxillary as a kind of "overseer" that supervises the said inspection duties. Thus employees of the same abattoir that produces the carcass also inspect it, which we believe to be a potential conflict of interest with consequences for consumers.*

*We also believe that a list of pathological conditions found in meat animals, have been designated by the NZ authorities as, "non-food safety dispositions", and are therefore conditions that can be dealt with by the plant employed inspector.*

*We believe this list to include abscesses, Actinomycosis, arthritis, Caseous Lymphadenitis, hydronephrosis, Fascioiliasis, pneumonia, tumours and even generalised conditions such as jaundice, melanosis, septicaemia, pyaemia etc.*

*If correct, this list renders current meat inspection as practised in the EU, as merely "a quality control system" that company staff are able to perform, rather than an official function that fully protects the consumer. As this is in direct contradiction of the current EU legislation, we would ask as to how this system can be considered "equivalent"?*

*We would like to ask if you are able to tell us who the UK representative on this group might be and perhaps provide contact details to us?*

*We would also like ask you (the FSA) as to your views on the "equivalence" of the New Zealand company inspection system?"*

The FSA very promptly provided the following reply, which includes some information included in the NZ submission to the group.

*"I will give you a little bit of background. In February 2012, NZ submitted a dossier to the EU Commission on its proposal for an alternative post mortem inspection system in bovine and ovine/caprine slaughterhouses. The objective of this proposal was to introduce changes to its inspection system in order to lay further responsibility on the Food Business Operator (FBO). To this end, NZ proposed making company inspectors responsible for quality related issues found during inspection. Food safety, animal health and welfare remained the responsibility of officials.*

*The NZ model is based on the following principles:*

- 1) Permanent presence of the Official Veterinarian in each slaughterhouse.*
- 2) At least one Government inspector carrying out close and continuous inspection of each production line.*
- 3) An additional off-line (roving) government inspector in a supervisory role.*
- 4) Company staff doing inspection duties, having attained the same level of competency as official inspectors.*
- 5) Company inspector role being confined to non-food safety matters, e.g. quality related matters.*

*6) Rigorous statistically based performance monitoring, measuring disease and defect identification, judgements and inspection procedures against inspection targets based on data collected over 10 years.*

*Under this model, post mortem inspection activities not related to food safety, animal health or animal welfare are the responsibility of FBO inspectors. The NZ model is underpinned by an assessment of the risks from the pathogens found during inspection in NZ (the epidemiological situation of NZ is significantly different to that of EU countries). In answer to your question, most of these pathogens/conditions are not of public health significance as cannot be transmitted through the consumption of meat.*

*Overall, the FSA supports the NZ proposal as it encourages FBOs to take more responsibility for the safe production of meat. However, while this model may be suitable for NZ, the FSA also recognises that such a system cannot be implemented within the current EU regulatory framework, and therefore cannot not be put into practice in the UK.*

*With regard to equivalence agreements, Codex guidelines specify that equivalence can be established if the exporting party can demonstrate that its measures, though different from the measures applied in an importing country, achieve the importing country's appropriate level of sanitary protection. Based on a) the epidemiological situation in NZ, b) assurances that the existing performance criteria will be maintained, c) an assessment of the risks, and d) a gradual*

*implementation plan, the Commission and Member States (MSs) concluded in March 2012 that the outcomes of the proposed system would be equivalent to those of the EU system, and therefore equivalence could be maintained.*

*The Potsdam Group is a discussion forum for the Commission and MSs to consider trade agreements between the EU and third countries on products subject to veterinary inspection. The FSA, as the Competent Authority in food safety matters, contributes to the Group's discussions through Defra, which represents the UK at Potsdam Group meetings.*

*I hope that I have addressed your concerns, but please do not hesitate to contact me for any queries”.*

Whether you are reassured or concerned by the reply is probably down to your own individual interpretation of the content. But the real point of concern for the Association is that we have committed ourselves to the preservation of a “fully independent” system of meat inspection, and we believe that what is being proposed is somewhat removed from this position.

I will of course keep you updated with any developments as and when I hear about them.

I'm sure you will agree that there is plenty to think about and the one thing that seems certain is that change is afoot.

We will endeavour to keep you informed of things as and when we learn of them!!!

In the meantime,

Keep up the good work.

Regards,

*Ian Robinson*