

Chief Executive's Report to the Board

FSA 24-03-07

Northern Ireland Executive

1. Since my [last report](#) at the end of 2023, the Northern Ireland Executive has been restored following a two-year absence. This followed the conclusion of discussions between the UK Government and political parties in Northern Ireland (NI), resulting in the publication of the '[Safeguarding the Union](#)' command paper and three associated statutory instruments.
2. There are new elements in the arrangements on intergovernmental ways of working between both NI ministers and officials, and their counterparts in Westminster. There is also increased Westminster scrutiny of regulatory changes that may impact GB-to-NI trade. For example, new requirements for Regulatory Impact Assessments will require us to include detailed analysis of the impact of any new FSA-led legislation on internal market trade.
3. We will engage with ministers in NI and look to progress our legislative priorities, such as, providing for the online display of food hygiene ratings so that NI consumers ordering food via online platforms or websites can make better informed decisions. We will also take forward other changes within NI domestic legislation that we were unable to progress in the absence of the NI Assembly, for example, updating references to the new EU Regulations governing official controls.

Northern Ireland Vending Event

4. On Tuesday 12 March, the FSA's dietary health team in Northern Ireland launched a new guide on nutritional standards and sustainability in vending at an event in Belfast. They were supported by the Chair and by the Director of UK and International Affairs, Anjali Juneja.
5. The event, opened by the Deputy Chief Medical Officer for Northern Ireland, Dr Naresh Chada convened representatives from government, local councils, private businesses, and the vending sector to hear about the new standards and their benefits.

Retained EU Law and Smarter Regulation

6. Under the Retained EU Law Act, which became law last year, the vast majority of the food law we inherited from the EU has been assimilated into domestic law. However, the Act provides us with some further opportunities to make changes to those laws over the next couple of years. We intended to focus our efforts this year on changes to the regulated products regime.
7. We also continue to engage with the UK Government's wider [Smarter Regulation](#) programme and have responded to the consultation on [Smarter regulation: regulating for growth](#) and the call for evidence on [Smarter regulation and the regulatory landscape](#). In our responses to these, we have highlighted:
 - the benefits that effective regulation can bring to both consumers and businesses, and the value to the UK economy of continuing trust in a food system worth over £240bn in total consumer expenditure, with food and drink exports worth over £20bn,

- our ambitions for regulatory reform; and
- our concerns around resourcing, both within the FSA to deliver reforms while managing a growing caseload of regulated products applications and delivering official controls, and in relation to the capacity and capability of local authorities to deliver official controls.

8. The FSA submitted [written evidence](#) along similar lines to the House of Lords Industry and Regulators Committee. This evidence, drawing on research from [Our Food 2022](#), publicly sets out our position on regulation and the role of regulators and drawing out our concerns about vet and local authority resourcing. The Committee's [Report](#) was published on 8 February and Director of Strategy and Regulatory Compliance, Katie Pettifer attended the launch event.

Borders Target Operating Model

9. The first stage of the Border Target Operating Model (BTOM) was implemented at the end of January with the introduction of health certification for EU Medium Risk Products of Animal Origin commodities. The FSA welcomes this significant step in ensuring that all imported food and feed is safe and meets the UK's high food standards. The first phase of implementation of these controls proceeded smoothly with low levels of queries that have focused on systems implementation, certification and risk categorisation. The FSA worked with the Animal and Plant Health Agency-managed helpline to resolve those queries that had a food safety component.

10. The next stage of BTOM implementation is on track for the end of April when risk-based physical checks will commence for EU Products of Animal Origin commodities and the new risk model and check rates will be extended to commodities from non-EU countries. This is a further important step in our [new border controls](#) that will provide further assurance about the safety of our imported food.

EFRA Non-Inquiry Session on Vet Shortages

11. Last week I gave evidence to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Committee [non-inquiry session on vet shortages](#). The Committee, chaired by Dr Neil Hudson FRCVS, probed the implications of vet shortages for the food industry, border controls, biosecurity and animal welfare. I was joined by Chief Veterinary Officer, Professor Christine Middlemiss, Professor Stuart Reid, Principal of the Royal Veterinary College and Dr Malcolm Morley MRCVS, Senior Vice President of the British Veterinary Association. I explained the importance of a steady supply of vets for critical public health roles and outlined the risks of vet shortages and the shared concerns of the FSA and Food Standards Scotland. These risks were highlighted in our latest [annual review of food standards](#), published in November 2023.

12. All the witnesses were aligned on the need for systemic change. To effectively deliver veterinary services, I said the FSA felt that there needed to be legislative change to the Veterinary Surgeons Act, financial backing, a supportive immigration policy and collaboration between partners across the profession, industry and government.

Mechanically Separated Meat

13. We published a [public consultation on Mechanically Separated Meat \(MSM\) Guidance](#) on 28 February. The consultation will be open for 12 weeks, closing 22 May. Through the consultation, feedback is sought specifically on:

- the effectiveness of the MSM Guidance document in providing support in light of the court judgments it refers to.

- the impacts of FBOs adapting their activities and operations in line with the court judgments.
- whether there are wider issues around MSM that the FSA, or indeed wider government, should be seeking to address and why.

14. A summary of responses will be published on the FSA website after the consultation closes.

Glycerol in Slushies

15. Following new [industry guidance](#) issued by the FSA in August 2023, two more cases of glycerol intoxication from slushies were reported in young children. In both instances, parents were unaware of the guidance and the risks associated with these drinks for young children. This led to additional efforts by the additives team along with the British Soft Drinks Association and slushie manufacturers to emphasise the importance of following the guidance. The FSA's Chief Scientific Adviser, Robin May appeared on Good Morning Britain and ITV News to raise awareness about this issue and the existing guidelines.

PATH-SAFE

16. I am pleased to report we have just received confirmation from HM Treasury for the continuation of PATH-SAFE funding for a fourth year, 2024/25. The additional funding of £4.6m will allow us to complete and expand the various surveillance pilots started within the original three-year programme. This includes extending the pathogen sequence data sharing platform from just Salmonella to including STEC and Listeria; and extending wastewater testing pilots to further refine the technology, with the long-term ambition of using this approach to help monitor foodborne disease incidence within the UK population.

Food Allergy

17. On 5 March, we launched a [campaign](#) highlighting the risk of vegan-labelled food for people with allergies. Our research revealed that 62% of people with an allergy to animal-based products, or those who buy for them, believed that vegan-labelled items are safe to eat. The campaign urges individuals with allergies to dairy, eggs, crustaceans and molluscs, or those purchasing for them, to check vegan-labelled products for precautionary allergen statements such as 'may contain' to help them decide whether it is safe to eat.

18. In January, we published the food allergy awareness champions research [report](#). This project was co-funded by UKRI as part of the Citizen Science programme. The study sought to enhance understanding of the purchasing habits and behaviours of people with food hypersensitivities when purchasing food online. Additionally, it aimed to employ accredited techniques to identify specific allergens in sampled food items obtained by participants.

Safer Food Better Business

19. We launched our new Safer Food Better Business (SFBB) Guidance for businesses on 5 February. The popular [SFBB pack](#) (which is free to download) contains detailed information on food safety management procedures and food hygiene regulations. It has been designed to meet the needs of different types of businesses – including small catering companies, small retail companies, restaurants and takeaways, as well as childminders and residential care homes. In 2023 there were more than 600,000 page views to the 'Safer Food, Better Business' pages of the FSA website and nearly 550,000 downloads of the guidance.

20. Among the updates included, is emphasis on the responsibilities of Food Business Operators (FBOs) about registration, documenting food safety practices, use of allergen information and training resources.

21. Each individual SFBB pack has specific information for different business requirements, including caterers and childminders. There is also a supplementary pack for residential care homes and training resources for colleges.

Food Hygiene Ratings Scheme

22. The three-year review report on the implementation and operation of the statutory Food Hygiene Ratings Scheme (FHRS) and operation of the appeals system in Wales was laid before the Senedd on 28 February. Evidence from evaluation of the FHRS indicates that increased transparency empowers consumers which in turn incentivises businesses to improve and maintain compliance.

23. The proportion of businesses with the highest food hygiene rating has continued to rise year on year, reaching 72.4% in November 2023 compared to 69.5% in November 2020. The FHRS in Wales continues to have a positive impact with the number of food businesses achieving the highest rating increasing by nearly three percentage points between November 2020 compared to November 2023. The report is available in both [Welsh](#) and [English](#) on the Senedd website.

Engagements

24. Since my last report to the Board, I have held regular meetings with counterparts in other government departments and the FSS.

25. In January, Director of Information and Science, Julie Pierce and I met Dr Andrew Swift, CEO of FERA. I joined the Chair at the Consumer Stakeholder Forum and attended the Association of Chief Executives Strategy Planning Session.

26. I chaired a meeting with stakeholders from the meat industry and was joined by Director of Operations, Junior Johnson.

27. In February, I spoke at a Women into Leadership event in Cardiff and gave a keynote speech at a Director Induction for the Leadership College for Government in York.

28. I met The British Frozen Food Federation and representatives from CLEAR (a food labelling consortium). I also met Lord Filkin.

29. I attended the National Farmers' Union celebratory event for departing President, Minnette Batters and also attended their annual conference in Birmingham.

30. I joined the Global Counsel dinner chaired by Archie Norman to understand the challenges facing the food and drink industry this year.

31. I attended the Defra F4 meeting with representatives from UK Hospitality, the British Retail Consortium, Food and Drink Federation and the National Farmers' Union.

32. I met the Editor of The Grocer, Adam Leyland.

33. In March, I attended the Women in Westminster Reception, and I joined a panel discussion at the Institute of Regulation annual conference on how to ensure regulators provide greater accountability and transparency to government.

34. To prepare for the EFRA evidence session on vets, I held meetings with Chief Veterinary Officer, Professor Christine Middlemiss, Professor Stuart Reid, Principal of the Royal Veterinary College and Senior Vice President of the British Veterinary Association, Dr Malcolm Morley MRCVS. I also met Charles Hartwell, CEO of Eville & Jones, the FSA's Service Delivery Partner.