

Chief Executive's Report to the Board

FSA 24/09/03 - Report from Katie Pettifer

1. This is my first report to the Board as Interim Chief Executive. I'd like to take this opportunity to put on record the Executive's gratitude to Emily Miles for her exceptional leadership and unwavering commitment to the FSA and its mission of food you can trust. It has been a pleasure to work with someone so capable, kind and utterly committed to doing the right thing for the public, and the FSA will miss her. We wish her all the best in her new role at Defra.

Government/Ministerial Changes

2. Since our last Board meeting, there has of course been a General Election. In the new UK Government, Wes Streeting as Secretary of State for Health and Andrew Gwynne as Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Public Health and Prevention have responsibility for the sponsorship of the FSA and for our governing legislation. We expect to work closely with many members of the new administration, including Defra Secretary of State, Steve Reed, and Minister of State (Food Security and Rural Affairs), Daniel Zeichner. The FSA Chair sent 14 introductory letters to new ministers, and I accompanied her to initial meetings with Andrew Gwynne and Daniel Zeichner in early September. We are working with colleagues across other departments to learn more about the government's priorities, how they plan to deliver the missions, and the role that the FSA can play.

3. In Wales, Eluned Morgan was appointed as Prif Weinidog (First Minister). Jeremy Miles is the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care and Sarah Murphy is Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing with responsibility for sponsorship of the FSA and our governing legislation. Huw Irranca-Davies is Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs, with responsibilities including developing the agri-food sector, associated supply chains, and promoting and marketing food and drink from Wales.

Spending Review 2025

4. The Spending Review 2025 was launched on 29 July 2024. It will set resource and capital budgets until at least 2027-28. This spending review process has two phases:

- Phase 1 will set the FSA's budget for 2025/26. We have submitted our return to HM Treasury and expect to know the outcome of this as part of the Autumn Statement on 30 October.
- Phase 2 will set the FSA's budget for later years and will be concluded in the spring.

5. There are a number of financial pressures that we are anticipating next year and in future years, and there are areas in which we feel that investment in the regulatory regime would have real benefits to consumers and business. We look forward to continuing our discussions with HM Treasury on how we can manage these pressures effectively and continue deliver our important work over the next few years.

Charges for Controls in Meat Premises

6. The FSA deploys veterinarians and meat hygiene inspectors who deliver official controls and other official activities in slaughterhouses and other approved meat premises. The law requires us to charge for some of these activities and allows us to charge for others. HM Treasury rules set out an expectation that the costs of services provided by public sector organisations are normally recovered in full, unless there is ministerial approval to do otherwise.

7. The service the FSA provides represents good value for business. The value of meat production was an estimated [£10.9 billion](#) in 2023 set against total FSA charges to the industry of £39.5m in 2023/24. However, it is clear the overall costs of providing the service will need to increase significantly from 2025/26. This is the result of several factors which include inflation and the rising visa costs for vets from overseas who are indispensable in delivering the necessary controls and activities given UK shortages in the veterinary profession.

8. We currently operate a system of discounts which provide support to the sector on a sliding scale with greater benefits to smaller businesses. This means that we do not recover our costs in full. In consultation with the sector, we have been gradually reducing discounts over recent years and we expect to recover approximately 70% of our recoverable costs in 2024/25.

9. These arrangements are subject to periodic review, and we have been able to provide justification for discounts to ministers over the years. However, with the current significant pressures on public finances and as we go into a new spending review period, we must continue to ensure that our discount scheme represents good value for money for the taxpayer, benefits the consumer and is a justified use of public funds. We expect to provide advice to new ministers on this issue in due course.

10. We want to be able to provide well-evidenced advice to the Board and to new ministers on discounts and any efficiency savings we can make within the current charging regime. So, on 12 September, we launched an open [Call for Evidence](#) on the benefits of discounts to consumers, industry and other stakeholders and on any opportunities to improve the efficiency of the current charging regime. This work will proceed alongside and will not replace the annual exercise to set charges and discounts for 2025/26.

11. We will be presenting a paper on meat charging to the next Board meeting on 11 December. This will outline what we have learned from the responses to the Call for Evidence and our other interactions with stakeholders, along with our conclusions on action that could be taken within the current legislative framework.

Mechanically Separated Meat Consultation Response

12. The twelve-week public consultation on Mechanically Separated Meat (MSM) Guidance closed on 22 May 2024. The consultation sought feedback on new FSA guidance on MSM, intended to support Food Business Operators in adapting their activities in line with court judgments that clarified how the definition of MSM should be interpreted and applied.

13. We have completed our analysis of responses which came from a range of stakeholders, including businesses, consumers, trade associations and local authorities. A [summary of responses](#) was published on 6 September.

14. We will consider where the guidance can be improved in light of the comments. We will also carry out an assessment of the impacts on businesses of adapting activities and processes in line with the court judgments. This will be published alongside the guidance in due course.

Market Authorisations

15. Following Board agreement and a consultation earlier this year, new UK Government ministers have confirmed they are content to proceed with our two initial market authorisation reform proposals to remove renewal requirements for authorised regulated products and allow authorisations to come into effect following ministerial decisions in England, Wales and Scotland, and then be published in an official register, rather than by secondary legislation.

16. We are now prioritising delivery of this work and the FSA and Food Standards Scotland's response to the spring 2024 public consultation on the proposals has now been [published](#). Subject to UK Government decisions on legislative timetabling, we hope to introduce legislation for these proposals in early 2025.

17. In the meantime, we have improved our internal processes and caseload management. We have also launched a new register which enables applicants to check the status of, and access information relevant to, their application. We continue to develop modernisation proposals for the service in line with our vision set out in the [June Board paper](#), in preparation for discussions with new ministers.

National Food Crime Unit (NFCU)

18. Following the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 and linked consultations, we are working on secondary legislation to confer powers on designated NFCU food crime officers and bring them under the complaint handling remit of the Independent Office for Police Conduct. We aim to have this before Parliament in the new year. There remains an outstanding requirement for legislation that would enable NFCU to be brought under the inspection regime of His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS). We have secured collective agreement for this policy via Department of Health and Social Care and are working with other departments to identify a suitable legislative vehicle for the outstanding changes.

19. The latest edition of the [Food Crime Strategic Assessment](#), produced by our NFCU in conjunction with Food Standards Scotland was published on 12 September. We have also published the [priorities](#) we are working to in the current financial year and continue to communicate with our partners about the threat picture and undertake activity to address the priorities we have set.

School Food Standards Compliance Pilot

20. In August, we published the final [report](#) of our pilot on School Food Standards Compliance. The pilot ran between September 2022 and July 2023 and was a joint project between the Department for Education, the Department of Health and Social Care and the FSA. 18 local authorities participated in it.

21. The pilot demonstrated that food safety officers were able to conduct additional School Food Standards checks alongside food hygiene inspections and to provide valuable insights, although some pressures on their workload were reported. Schools were happy to facilitate the checks, and in some cases, this acted as a catalyst for them to review their school food provision. However, the report makes clear that there was inconsistency in the extent to which schools acted to address potential non-compliance when it was identified, and some local authorities experienced difficulties in following up with schools and caterers.

22. We are working with the Department for Education and the Department of Health and Social Care to determine the next steps following the findings of the pilot.

Risk Assessment

23. Since the June board we have published 16 pre-market safety assessments as part of our market authorisations service. We have also concluded risk assessments for plant-based drinks, Bisphenol A (BPA), Titanium dioxide in food and bamboo within plastic containers or utensils. These are significant multi-year assessments across a range of our areas within our remit, involving input from several teams across the FSA and Food Standards Scotland together with Scientific Advisory Committees.

24. In the case of bamboo products, the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products, and the Environment has reviewed new data submitted to us and determined that there is insufficient evidence to confirm the safety of these products, with ongoing concerns about their potential health impacts from long term use. As a result, in July, we issued an updated [notice](#) on plastic containers and utensils using bamboo. With Food Standards Scotland, we continue to advise consumers against using plastic containers or utensils that contain bamboo or other unauthorised plant-based materials and remind businesses not to sell these products, as they do not comply with current legislation and raise safety concerns.

25. The guidance follows our May 2022 directive which instructed the industry to stop selling food contact materials containing bamboo and similar unauthorised plant-based materials such as rice husks, wheat straw, and hemp and called for [evidence](#) to evaluate their long-term safety. The FSA and Food Standards Scotland advised that these products should remain off the market in Great Britain. In Northern Ireland these products have already been banned as food contact materials under the European Commission Food Contact Material legislation and businesses continue to comply with this regulation.

International Work and Strategic Food Safety Dialogue

26. In July, the FSA participated in a meeting of the Strategic Food Safety Dialogue – an informal forum of food regulators from the UK, European Commission, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand that meet yearly but progress work in subgroups throughout the year. At this year's meeting, there was agreement by the group to take forward joint work on topics including veterinary resource and retention, food fraud, crisis response, and electronic certification. The group will next meet in summer 2025.

27. Also in July, UK fish establishments were audited by South Korea. Auditors were extremely complimentary of the UK competent authorities' organisation and delivery of this inward inspection, including the input of the FSA and the local authorities, especially because it was the first of its kind to the UK. All four audited establishments (who export cooked whelks to South Korea) 'passed' their inspections which means market access is maintained for these establishments. UK exports of seafood products to South Korea were worth £8.7m in 2023. The FSA secures local authority input, supports the establishments before and during the inspections and presents to the auditing authorities our Official Control regime.

Engagements

28. In August, whilst deputising for the Chief Executive during her annual leave, I gave an interview on BBC Breakfast highlighting issues with local authority resourcing and raising awareness of the Food Hygiene Ratings Scheme.

29. In September, since taking up the Interim Chief Executive role, I have attended introductory meetings with two ministers as described above. I have also attended a Food Foundation parliamentary event, hosted by Baroness Boycott. I have given a speech alongside Junior Johnson, Director of Operations, at the Association of Meat Inspectors Seminar and I also gave an interview on National Level Regulation to The Grocer Magazine.