

# NEWS RELEASE



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## **BMPA Call for MHS and FSA to Stand Firm on Union Action**

The British Meat Processors Association (BMPA) is urging the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) and Food Standards Agency (FSA) to ensure they do not deviate from the proposed changes to reform the MHS, including the modernisation of employment terms and conditions, despite the looming threat of industrial action from Unison.

Unison are currently balloting their members over a proposal which includes a move to rostering work over a 37 hour week and removing the right to be paid compulsory overtime. Overtime opportunities will continue and paid on an 'as worked', casual basis and will not be paid during annual leave or periods of sickness absence.

Stuart Roberts says "In today's world, it is not unreasonable to expect people to work flexibly, although from what I understand, individuals' working hours will continue to reflect service needs as now. It is absolutely vital that Terms and Conditions are modernised if the MHS is to develop a service that is fit for purpose and at a cost that the Industry and the taxpayer can afford."

"An MHS pay rise is probably overdue but the notion of permanently fixed hours and contractual overtime is now all but consigned to employment history."

If MHS staff vote for industrial action, it is likely to lead to a seventy-two hour strike in the week commencing 1 or 8 December and be highly damaging to meat businesses. Current estimates put the cost of action to industry at £3m.

### **Notes for Editors**

1. The Meat Hygiene Service is an executive agency of the Food Standards Agency (FSA) and has a statutory monopoly on the supply of meat hygiene inspectors to GB abattoirs, the cost of which is largely footed by the taxpayer but with a significant contribution from Industry.
2. In order to slaughter and process livestock in GB, an abattoir must have a permanent presence of MHS staff during operating hours.

3. Over the last 18 months, the MHS has been going through a change programme in tandem with plans to share more of its costs with Industry. Central to the changes is a more effective and efficient service.
4. One reason for MHS inefficiencies is that many of the front line staff have outdated terms and conditions which have not been modernised for a long time. These terms and conditions must be addressed if the MHS is to reduce its costs and deliver better value for money.
5. To ensure more optimal use of MHS staff, it is vital that hours can be varied within a working week. At present, if a plant were to operate for five hours a day on four days and 9 hours on the fifth, staff would be paid for 37 hours plus 1.5 hours overtime for the longer day.