Annexe A

PRINCIPLES FOR FUTURE OFFICIAL CONTROLS IN SLAUGHTERHOUSES

Key objectives

1. Official controls in slaughterhouses must be conducted in a manner that recognises changes in the nature of risks to public health over the years since meat inspection was first introduced.

2. As a minimum future official controls in slaughterhouses must provide effective protection:
   - against meat borne risks to public health;
   - for the welfare of animals;
   - against the risks associated with the spread of animal disease.

3. This should be achieved by a system of official controls in slaughterhouses which is:
   - risk based,
   - proportionate,
   - effective,
   - targeted; and
   - cost effective.

4. Controls in slaughterhouses should be undertaken by the person or persons best placed to ensure their effectiveness in the most cost effective manner and Member States should be given authority to delegate delivery of controls to such persons as appropriate.

5. We will not support changes which we consider will reduce the effectiveness of official controls in slaughterhouses, and we will consider carefully any changes that may increase the cost of controls across the food chain.

Background

6. Animal husbandry practices and meat production systems have evolved significantly in recent years. The current system of meat official controls, particularly post-mortem inspection of meat, is based on a traditional inspection approach, developed more than a hundred years ago, to tackle the public health concerns of that era, such as parasites and other defects that were visible to the naked eye. These historical meat borne public health hazards are on the decline and the main causes of foodborne disease today are microbiological (for example, campylobacter, salmonella and E.coli), which cannot be seen by the naked eye and cannot be addressed through traditional inspection activities.

7. Following changes to the EU hygiene legislation in 2004 a more risk-based, “farm to fork” approach was introduced for all food. Similarly, the overarching EU legislation on official controls performed to ensure the verification of compliance with feed and food law, animal health and animal welfare rules (EC (Reg.) No. 882/2004) sets out a framework for risk based controls, in which sanctions are effective, proportionate and persuasive. However, this risk based vision has not been fully realised in the more detailed regulations setting out official controls in the meat sector, where legislation still specifies the inputs to the process and who is responsible for the actions required, rather than focusing on the outcomes that should be achieved.

8. Slaughterhouses are a key point in the food chain for animal health and welfare surveillance, and monitoring of animal health and welfare are a key part of the official controls which take place at slaughterhouses.

9. The current meat inspection system in most circumstances relies on permanent presence of officials in approved meat establishments performing tasks which may not address all of the key
public health issues. We believe it will be possible to get better public health, animal health and animal welfare outcomes with a more effective and efficient system.

10. We cannot be certain that the current system:

- provides the best protection for consumers;
- delivers the best value for money for the taxpayer;
- encourages food business operator responsibility; and
- allows enforcers to allocate resources effectively based on risk.

11. The current system of meat official controls is set out in European legislation and any changes must therefore be negotiated with the European Commission, other Member States, and the European Parliament. These negotiations will begin formally in 2012 when the Commission plans to table a set of proposals for amendment to the Hygiene Package by co-decision.

Where do we want to be in the future?

12. The changes that might deliver our negotiating objectives include:

i. Official Control tasks only to be mandated in regulation if there is clear evidence that they protect and as a minimum maintain existing levels of protection for public health, animal health and animal welfare;

ii. A shift of the official role from inspection to verification where this is appropriate to the level of risk;

iii. More responsibility taken by the food business operator (FBO) for public health, animal health and animal welfare, with FBOs held accountable for their actions;

iv. An enforcement regime that provides incentives for food business operators who comply with the rules and punitive actions on non-compliant food business operators who present the greatest risk to public health, animal health or animal welfare.

What will be the benefits from making changes?

13. A full impact assessment will be carried out once the European Commission has published a detailed proposal. In the meantime, we expect that changes to the current system in line with the principles described above could provide the following benefits:

- consumers will benefit from a greater level of public health, animal health and animal welfare protection;
- taxpayers will benefit from more effective spending of public funds to reduce the level of foodborne pathogens and therefore the cost to society of foodborne disease; and to maintain or improve existing animal health and welfare controls in slaughterhouses;
- compliant businesses who control risks effectively will benefit from a lower cost of regulation; and
- enforcers will be able better to allocate resources according to risk and practice a more targeted approach to enforcement actions.