Thank you for the invitation to say a few words on behalf of the BMPA on the issue of future meat inspection.

I recognise that the primary focus of interest today is pigs. However, as the BMPA represents cattle, sheep and pig processors, many of my remarks will apply to the red meat species more widely, and not solely to pigs. They will also be fairly general remarks at this stage, since there is a great deal of discussion yet to be had about the details of what a future meat inspection system should look like.

The BMPA, both here and through our European trade association, UECBV, has been working on the matter of future meat inspection for some time – it’s a priority issue for our processing members. We are encouraged by the general direction of political discussion on this issue:

- the French Government’s initiative in launching a debate on modernising meat inspections during its Presidency in 2008
- the Council’s call on the Commission in 2009 to come forward with proposals for a modernised system, and
- the Commission’s subsequent mandate to the European Food Safety Authority to carry out scientific assessments of the current meat inspection system on a species-by-species basis.

The first of these EFSA scientific opinions is, of course, that on pigs, published in October last year. Further opinions on poultry will follow in June this year, and on other species, including ruminants, in June 2013.

At this point I would like to say publicly today that while the meat industry has its differences with our own FSA over the current costs and delivery of meat inspections, we strongly welcome both the Agency’s support for and active promotion of long term change in the EU framework of official controls, and the Agency’s valuable programme of research to inform the scientific evidence base for changes in inspection methods. I know that Ouafa that will be saying much more about this research programme later today.

But I do not underestimate the likely resistance to change in some quarters, both here and in Europe, and I urge the FSA to keep an unwavering eye on modernisation.

Our starting point is that the current system of EU meat inspection:

- is outdated
- it does not adequately address today’s foodborne hazards
- it is excessively prescriptive
- it is not risk-based, and
- it places a disproportionate and costly regulatory burden on meat processors.

In short, it fails some key tests of what constitutes good regulation. In looking to the future, we need to keep firmly in mind the basic principle that Food Business Operators are responsible for delivering safe food, based on good manufacturing and hygiene practices, and HACCP.

We need a system that rewards good hygiene performance and penalises poor performance by FBOs. Where FBOs can demonstrate the relevant competences, increasingly, as much as possible should be delegated to them, with the competent authority’s role being much more
one of verifying that official controls have been properly carried out. This should also involve
more targeted and independent audits and, where appropriate, less frequent official
inspections.

Together, the onus of responsibility on FBOs for producing safe food, and a bonus/malus
approach would, I believe, drive up food safety standards.

We need a system that eliminates unnecessary or inappropriate controls, where official
controls are focussed on food safety, as well as animal health and animal welfare, and leaves
quality controls to the FBO.

We need to modernise official meat inspections based on a flexible, science based toolkit of
options that recognises the differing incidence and level of foodborne hazards amongst and
even within EU member states, and that matches meat inspections to these varying
conditions and circumstances. We need to get away from the largely one-size-fits-all system
we have at present. Very importantly - and I want to stress this - in developing and
negotiating a new system, we must avoid an outcome that maintains much of the existing
burden of inspections, while simply adding new elements and burdens.

One of my real concerns is that when the Commission comes forward with legislative
proposals – and it has stated that it will make proposals towards the middle of this year –
depending on the legal basis of these, we must avoid a situation where negotiations between
the Commission, the European Parliament and the Council, with various interest groups
interjecting, results in a hotch-potch of a future inspection system, and a lost opportunity for
real modernisation.

As highlighted at both the Commission’s third roundtable conference last December and the
conference hosted by the Danish Presidency in early February, the discussion to date seems
to be focused more on the ‘What?’ – what inspections are carried out – than on the ‘Who?’ –
who carries out the inspections and who pays for what.

The BMPA is equally concerned in this ‘Who?’ aspect - how inspections are organised,
delivered and financed. In this connection and in passing, I would also say that the potential
role of what one might call ‘private’ assurance schemes should be explored. The
Commission is investigating aspects of the organisation and financing of official controls, and
I am keen for consideration of these aspects to keep pace with the discussion on ‘What?’
controls.

As I said at the outset, I don’t intend to go into any great detail here today as regards the
veterinary aspects of future inspections of pigs, not least because BMPA pigmeat processor
members have not yet discussed the EFSA opinion in great depth. So some of my remarks
today are rather more personal observations than representing a formally agreed BMPA
position.

The EFSA opinion confirms what we all know – that current official controls do not address
today’s public health hazards in relation to pigs, and it identifies what it calls these ‘new’
hazards.

The opinion concludes that what is needed to tackle these hazards is comprehensive and
integrated pork carcase safety assurance, with a range of preventive measures and controls
applied on-farm and in abattoirs.

This seems a rational conclusion, but, of course, as always, the devil is in the detail.

It seems to me sensible to set desired food safety outcomes, that is, targets for chilled
carcases, but we should not set prescribed targets at each and every stage of farm
production and processing in abattoirs. How these targets for chilled carcases are then
translated into what farmers and plants have to do is up for discussion.
For some hazards, food chain information – properly collected and interpreted – is potentially a powerful tool to identify the level of risk posed by incoming live pigs. I say “properly collected and interpreted” because my appreciation of the current situation is that food chain information provisions are far from being applied in a way that produces meaningful and useable information. Meaningful food chain information could, however, inform the nature of herd health practices on farms, as well as the steps taken in the plant itself. FCI may also influence processors’ own procurement policies and practices in relation to their suppliers. But, crucially, we must seek to avoid or at least minimise undue complexity and cost in the production process.

With a comparatively high proportion of the UK pig herd being outdoors, we must also ensure that any future inspection system is appropriate and proportionate in the controls that are placed on outdoor pig production and slaughter. Here, the FSA is carrying out some very useful work on trials around visual inspection of outdoor pigs.

Much more discussion needs to be had about what ante mortem and post mortem inspections are carried out and by whom in plants. The BIOHAZ panel’s conclusions in the EFSA opinion do not recommend any changes in ante mortem inspection of pigs. Official veterinarians must continue to play a key role in relation to ante mortem controls, and in relation to disease surveillance. But I believe that there is also scope for competent, trained plant staff to have a greater role in ante mortem inspections – at least we should look into this.

In relation to post mortem inspections, the EFSA opinion on pigs is clear that some current procedures are not merely unnecessary, but can actually compromise food safety. There is general agreement that routine incision and palpation should end.

Many of the conclusions and recommendations in the EFSA opinion are positive. But, depending on how they are implemented on the ground, we must recognise that aspects of modernisation of meat inspection are likely to pose real challenges – as well as opportunities - for some plants and for some producers.

In short, chairman, we have to achieve an outcome that:

- enhances public health protection
- addresses the real food safety risks
- is practical and sensible
- is flexible
- does not increase the overall level of regulation, and
- is cost effective.

Finally, of course, any future inspection system must enable the EU to trade freely on global markets.

Thank you.