

Publication of the Meat Inspection Section Scheme by the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.

The Department announced the Independent Meat Inspection Scheme in the Government Gazette Vol 625, No. 40965 of July 7, 2017

The scheme aims to make meat inspection for all abattoirs the legal requirements in terms of the Meat Safety Act. This Act was already introduced in 2000 but this aspect has never been fully implemented by the department.

Meat safety is basic service delivered to the benefit of the consumer and should not be a requirement for selected clients or consumers.

The department released a policy document after extensive consultation in 2013 with a final recommendation for meat inspection services in South Africa (March 2013). (An extract is attached).

The publication of the Meat Inspection Scheme (No 364 of July 7, 2017) provides for the delivery of meat inspection services by agencies and also address the shortcomings of this service for our facilities to maintain or enter the export market.

☐ *How does the Association view in the light of the fact that it has been so long?*

The announcement is welcomed by the industry in order to establish uniform national standards for one of the important safeguards for meat safety to the consumer. The services as defined in the scheme now also ensure that the regulatory requirements at an abattoir, under the supervision of a veterinarian, are continuously monitored. These requirements also ensure that our abattoirs comply with the required export standards, to obtain meat inspection services which can meet the standards of importing countries.

The scheme refers to the provision of services by the state to rural abattoirs and infrequently slaughtering low throughput abattoirs. This aspect of national inspection services must be urgently implemented to ensure that all services are serviced to a minimum standard.

☐ *How important is an independent service, the pros and cons, and the impact on meat exports, for example, is it important for export?*

Meat inspection services according to minimum requirements are a basic right of every consumer. The PVS Report on Veterinary Services in South Africa (2014) has already indicated that SA is at risk of forfeiting export opportunities if attention is not given to the standards and legal responsibility of meat inspection services. Remember that the definition of meat inspection services refers not only to physical inspection of the carcass but also to regulatory application that includes aspects such as animal welfare, hygiene, slaughter techniques, cooling and documentation systems at the abattoir. The emphasis is not only on independence but must also set minimum standards with the assurance that there is no unlawful competition in the industry due to different standards and application in provinces and industries.

☐ *Were the inputs of the industry taken into account in the scheme will look like are there outstanding issues?*

The Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries has consulted with the various meat industries through a Meat Inspection working group, and the scheme was also published for broader comments. Certain recommendations were considered and at the same time the red meat industry made certain concessions regarding uniform standards for all red meat products.

The direct payment will continue according to the document until the funding model is finalized in article 19. The industry is very concerned that such a state model will contribute unnecessary costs without adding

value to the principle of independence. We will discuss it as a matter of urgency with the department.

It is a pity that the applications are not addressed to the National Department. Unfortunately, this will lead to tremendous duplication with some agencies that are likely to provide services in all nine provinces. The National Department will still be able to consult with provinces regarding the appointment of an agency in the province.

☐ *Is there enough time for the assignees to apply and are there enough staff?*

Although meat inspection agencies have never been formally appointed since the promulgation of the draft scheme, the staff of a number of companies have for some time been supplying meat inspection services to high-throughput abattoirs. Not all agencies, however, deliver exclusively meat inspection and classification services to abattoirs, but it should not be difficult for such companies to restructure and only limit functions to meat inspection.

☐ *Are there enough veterinarians for what is required in the scheme?*

The availability and appointment of a veterinarian is already part of the legal requirement of meat inspection services at an abattoir. The important difference is that this vet will now be part of the agency's agreement with the abattoir and thus be a contractual service to the agency with more extensive functions and monitoring than currently the case. Further orientation will also be required for private veterinarians who will provide these services to agencies.

☐ *Will the new dispensation abattoirs cost more than the current dispensation? If not, why not? If so, how will your members recoup these costs?*

Meat inspection is supposed to be a public service for the benefit of the industry, consumer and is rendered or subsidized by the state throughout the world.

Due to various circumstances, this option was not considered or recommended by the Department in the Final Recommendation for Meat Inspection Services in South Africa (March 2013).

This scheme now paves the way for meat inspection services as a combination of public and private services, allowing the establishment of a meat inspection forum (section 19) the opportunity for the various meat industries to be part of decision making on the delivery of these services but forfeiting all the principles of independence

☐ *What will happen to the inspectors who are now in abattoir service, should they start their own enterprises and leave the abattoirs?*

There is a general shortage of meat inspectors with sufficient experience in the industry. We do not ensure that inspectors who do not currently perform independent services will be without employment opportunities with agencies. The delivery of agency services will probably provide better job security. The announcement about the appointment of agencies also relieves many uncertainties by dedicated meat inspection staff for the past decade.

☐ *Is HMS also taken over by the agencies? What happens to those already working permanently for the company*

No, at a high throughput facility, it remains the responsibility of the abattoir. However, in terms of the regulatory application, the agency also has an obligation to ensure that this aspect of the regulation is also applied.

The industry has requested that a permission be granted to keep the meat inspector responsible for the system at smaller abattoirs (low throughput and more cost effective)