2 Sisters and Standards in Poultry Processing: Government Response to the Committee’s First Report

Fifth Special Report of Session 2017–19

Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed 24 January 2018
The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and associated public bodies.

Current membership

Neil Parish MP (Conservative, Tiverton and Honiton) (Chair)
Alan Brown MP (Scottish National Party, Kilmarnock and Loudoun)
Paul Flynn MP (Labour, Newport West)
John Grogan MP (Labour, Keighley)
Dr Caroline Johnson MP (Conservative, Sleaford and North Hykeham)
Kerry McCarthy MP (Labour, Bristol East)
Sandy Martin MP (Labour, Ipswich)
Mrs Sheryll Murray MP (Conservative, South East Cornwall)
David Simpson MP (Democratic Unionist Party, Upper Bann)
Angela Smith MP (Labour, Penistone and Stocksbridge)
Julian Sturdy MP (Conservative, York Outer)

Powers

The committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the Internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publications

Committee reports are published on the Committee's website at www.parliament.uk/efracom and in print by Order of the House.

Evidence relating to this report is published on the inquiry publications page of the Committee's website.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Eliot Barrass (Clerk), Sian Woodward (Clerk), Daniel Schlappa (Second Clerk), Anwen Rees (Committee Specialist), Ian Blair (Committee Assistant) and Annabel Russell (Committee Assistant).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 7341; the Committee's email address is efracom@parliament.uk.
Fifth Special Report

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee published its First Report of Session 2017–19, on *2 Sisters and Standards in Poultry Processing* [HC 490] on 17 November 2017. The Government’s response was received on 18 January 2018 and is appended to this report.

Government Response

**Letter from Steve Brine MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Public Health and Primary Care**

I am writing to provide the Government response to the above Committee report published on 17 November 2017.

As requested by the Committee, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) has taken a lead role as the sector regulator on the issues highlighted and worked with the relevant stakeholders with differing responsibilities to deliver on commitments and consider recommendations.

Since the allegations were made in late September, the FSA has been conducting a detailed investigation to consider the actions required in response to the allegations made in the media and commenced work on building closer links between regulators, accreditation bodies, retailers and the 2 Sisters Food Group (2SFG) in the sharing of data and intelligence.

The investigation, which has included interviewing staff and watching many hours of CCTV footage, has highlighted several weaknesses within the process of maintaining and monitoring food hygiene and standards. Areas where there has been scope for improvement have been identified and the recommendations to rectify are being developed for consideration. These recommendations have taken into account the commitments made at the Select Committee’s oral hearing on 25 October 2017 and the findings and conclusions published in the resulting EFRA Committee report.

Since the publication of the allegations, 2SFG have been conducting their own investigations and have been sharing information with the regulators. The company has made improvements to its own processes and sought to demonstrate its commitment to best practice and transparency in its operations.

As an update on the need to improve the sharing of data and intelligence by the range of stakeholders involved in the poultry processing industry the FSA has received a positive response from all parties to date and engagement to progress this agenda is progressing. The FSA is keen to build this recommendation into its wider agenda and the Regulating our Future programme which is currently reviewing the regulatory approach within the food industry.

One of the key recommendations made by the Committee was to expand the consultation on compulsory CCTV in slaughterhouses to include cutting plants. CCTV footage has been utilised as part the investigation by the FSA and they are considering CCTV monitoring in cutting plants. They will seek potential options going forwards with Defra.
The Committee indicated its support for the development of an investigative capability within the National Food Crime Unit. The FSA has welcomed this finding and will provide further updates to the Committee.

The Committee has made a specific request for the FSA to update it within three months of the publication of the report (i.e. by 17 February 2018) and provide a further update within six months (not later than 17 May 2018). The FSA is working to a timetable of having completed its investigation of 2SFG by that February timescale, as well as providing a wider and more detailed update on the work of the FSA and the other stakeholders at that juncture. The Chief Executive of the FSA, Jason Feeney CBE, will write again in February when the FSA has completed its investigation.