

Veterinary Ireland Media Release (2 December 2011)

VETS VOTE IN FAVOUR OF INDUSTRIAL ACTION

Following proposals from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, which would result in the downgrading of the Veterinary Inspection aspect of the independent Meat Inspection Service operating in meat export plants, members of Veterinary Ireland, the Union for vets in Ireland, have overwhelmingly voted in favour of industrial action, up to and including strike action.

This independent veterinary based Meat Inspection Service (MIS) is an important aspect in ensuring that Irish meat, and especially beef, is safe for eating by consumers both at home and overseas.

Ireland is the largest exporter of beef in Europe, and ranks amongst Brazil, Australia and the USA in the volume of beef it exports each year. 90% of all Irish beef is exported, going to over 50 countries around the globe, bringing in €1.51 billion in 2010. This export is important to Ireland economically, and the reputation of Irish beef is greatly enhanced by the independent Meat Inspection Service currently in place in all export plants.

Veterinary practitioners, employed by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine as Temporary Veterinary Inspectors (TVIs), provide the veterinary expertise critical to the integrity of this service. TVIs are stationed on the meat plant lines and have an overview of all the animals from the moment they arrive at the plant to the point where they are made ready to be exported as carcasses. Vets are therefore responsible for animal health and welfare, as well as food safety and public health, all along this processing chain.

Vets also play a significant surveillance role in these duties, and it was a vet TVI in a meat plant in the UK who first spotted and diagnosed Foot and Mouth Disease in the UK in 2001.

The Department's proposals include the replacing of Vets with non-veterinary Department Technical Agricultural Officers (TAOs) and other Food Business Operator (FBO) Staff, employed by the meat plants themselves.

Veterinary Ireland argues that veterinary involvement in the Meat Inspection Service provides the world's highest standard of ante- and post-mortem inspection, standards which most other countries can only aspire to. Also that by including Vets in the system, Irish farmers enjoy a competitive advantage over other countries, but by removing the vet TVIs from these duties, standards will be lowered to those of other countries, and Irish farmers and their produce will lose that advantage.

Speaking today, Finbarr Murphy, Chief Executive of Veterinary Ireland stated that *"it is vital that we maintain our independent veterinary based Meat Inspection Service in*

Ireland. We are the third largest beef exporting country in the world and it is vital that we maintain our very high standards and reputation for food safety”.

In Veterinary Ireland’s ballot of its TVI Members, 89% of votes were in favour of taking Industrial Action, up to and including Strike Action in order to achieve the protection of TVIs terms and conditions of employment, and the integrity and independence of the Meat Inspection Service. Veterinary Ireland has served one week’s notice of this Industrial Action on the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

For more information on Veterinary Ireland’s Industrial Action Contact:

Finbarr Murphy

Chief Executive, Veterinary Ireland

Email: HQ@vetireland.ie or call **01 457 7976**

Veterinary Ireland is a Trade Union, affiliated to the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU). Amongst its other veterinary employee members, Veterinary Ireland provides Union representation to those of its members who are employed by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine as Temporary Veterinary Inspectors (TVIs) in the independent Meat Inspection Service (MIS) operating on the meat processing lines in export meat plants in Ireland.

*Veterinary Ireland is always happy to provide appropriately qualified and informed persons to contribute further to veterinary and animal welfare debate in a constructive and reasoned manner. Please contact Veterinary Ireland HQ on **01 457 7976** or by e-mail at HQ@vetireland.ie.*



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