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for Environment  
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**Date: April 2019**

Dear Stakeholder,

### **Re: Update on Ageing of Sheep at Slaughterhouse**

I am writing to say why we will not be introducing an alternative protocol for ageing lambs at slaughter for this season and to set out our proposals for the future.

At this present time, lambs presented for slaughter will continue to be subject to existing domestic legislative arrangements. This means there is no change to your current systems. Sheep aged over 12 months or with 1 permanent incisor erupted in the gum will be split and Specified Risk Material (SRM) removed.

We have been discussing an alternative process put forward by the industry. Under this process, all lambs evidenced as born the previous year and presented for slaughter would not routinely be tooth-checked. This would enable the industry to take advantage of last year's amendment to the EU TSE Regulation that enables Member States to approve a different method for estimating whether a lamb is aged over twelve months for the purpose of removing the skull and spinal cord.

Key steps for us to introduce such a change would be an amendment to our domestic legislation, an agreed and enforceable protocol for use at the slaughterhouse, and a public consultation. The legislation would protect the food business operator from unwittingly acting unlawfully in breach of the requirements set out in Schedule 7 of the TSE statutory instruments. The protocol needs to meet the needs of our official controls. Consultation needs to offer the opportunity for all relevant parties to comment, including consumers, retailers, food processors, slaughterhouse operators and farmers.

We have carefully and thoroughly looked at all possibilities to fast-track this work. Given legislative processes and the need to agree the protocol and carry out a public consultation, and to ensure that all relevant stakeholders are sufficiently informed and prepared for implementation, it will not be feasible to deliver the change in time for this year's proposed cut-off date of 30 June 2019.

Defra met industry stakeholders, the Food Standards Agency, Food Standards Scotland and the Governments of the Devolved Administrations on 4 March 2019 to seek views on postponing the introduction of the proposed alternative system. There was then the imminent prospect of leaving the EU in a 'no deal' scenario as a 'third country' without clear and agreed trading arrangements in place for export to the EU of products of animal origin.

Later, when the relevant EU committee ('SCoPAFF') met on 9 April 2019, Member States unanimously voted to list the UK as an approved third country. This vote guaranteed that exports of live animals and animal products to the EU could have continued if the UK had left the EU without a deal on 12 April 2019. Following the Article 50 extension up to 31 October 2019, the European Commission have confirmed that a further SCoPAFF vote will be required to list the UK prior to a potential no deal EU Exit in the future.

In a 'deal' scenario the UK will not need to be listed during any implementation period. Common rules will remain in place until the end of any such implementation period meaning businesses will be able to trade on the same terms as now up until the end of that period.

We will continue to plan for introduction. We want to work with you through the steps outlined above, bearing in mind the background of the UK's planned exit from the EU. I plan to set up regular sessions where we all update one another and I look forward to those.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Catherine Harrold', written in a cursive style.

Catherine Harrold, Deputy Director, Future Animal & Public Health, Endemics & Traceability Directorate

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