Australian Government

Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment

Meat Export Policy

Eligibility criteria for Tier 2 export establishments to move to an annual audit frequency

Policy Objective

To reduce the regulatory burden and cost associated with the departmental audit and assurance process for high performing export establishments without deteriorating market access outcomes.

Current audit system

Audits of export meat establishments are performed to provide assurances to the Department that meat and meat products for export for food, are produced in accordance with legislative and importing country requirements. Audits are focused on assessing the effectiveness of an establishment's implementation of their approved arrangement. At Tier 2 abattoirs, independent boning rooms and wild game establishments, these assessments are coupled with the results of inspection and verification activities undertaken by authorised officers (OPVs, FSMAs and AAOs) and numerous plant performance data sets of product and process, to enable health certification to be issued.

Tier 2 abattoirs, independent boning rooms and wild game establishments have two options regarding the department audit program they participate in. These are monthly periodic audits (or quarterly for non-US listed independent boning rooms) or six monthly system audits. Currently 33 abattoirs have monthly periodic audits and 43 abattoirs have six monthly system audits. The two wild game establishments have six monthly audits. All of the 8 independent boning rooms have periodic audits.

The six monthly frequency of the system audits is the minimum audit frequency allowed by the current system audit policy. Audits may be conducted at a higher frequency in response to non-compliance (e.g. failed audits, point of entry issues), but there is no provision to conduct audits at a lower frequency in response to consistent establishment compliance.

Proposed eligibility criteria to allow establishments to move to annual system audits

It is proposed to introduce eligibility criteria that can be used to determine if an establishment has achieved a level of compliance to enable the minimum system audit frequency for the establishment to be annual. The following proposed performance criteria have been selected to ensure that only establishments that have mature approved arrangement management systems that result in sustained and consistent compliance are eligible to move to an annual audit.

1   Previous system audit performance

Establishments must have obtained acceptable audit ratings from their three previous systems audits with no critical non-compliances identified during those audits.

An acceptable audit rating is a rating generated by the Audit Management System that is ≥80%. Critical non-compliances are defined in legislation and relate to the preparation, export or certification of product that is not fit for human consumption or has not met importing country requirements. The audit scoring approach will be made available for transparency.

2   No recent history of critical incidents

Establishments must have no critical incidents in the past 12 months.

Critical incidents are defined in the Critical Incident Response (CIR) guideline (https://www.awe.gov.au/biosecurity-trade/export/controlled-goods/meat/elmer-3/guideline-critical-incident-response). They include violations of importing country requirements detected at the point of entry and failures of specific department auditor verification programs conducted at the establishment.

This criteria is primarily aimed at critical incidents that should be effectively controlled by an establishment's Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) plan. The CIR guideline provides for a degree of flexibility to assess the significance of an incident.

3   Participation in all department process control monitoring and verification programs

Establishments must participate in all department required process control monitoring and verification programs and provide data obtained from the programs to the department as required.

Currently these are the microbiological testing and macroscopic contamination monitoring programs that are part of the Product Hygiene Indicator system. It is likely that these systems will evolve as a result of activity of the modernisation working group. Establishments will need to fully participate in these future programs to move to annual audits, including real time data capture of key plant and product performance indicators.

4   Certification with a Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) recognised scheme or equivalent

Establishments must be certified as compliant with the requirements of a GFSI recognised (or equivalent) scheme. Annual audit reports are provided to the department. Examples of these schemes include British Retail Consortium and Safe Quality Food (SQF).

5   Certification with the Australian Animal Welfare Certification System

Establishments must be certified by AUS-MEAT as compliant with the requirements of the Australian Animal Welfare Certification System. Annual audit reports are provided to the department.

6 Utilisation of electronic product integrity systems

Establishments must utilise electronic product integrity systems and make data generated by these systems readily available to the department for verification purposes. An example of this is the use of electronic meat transfer certificates (eMTC).

Criteria for increasing audit frequency

Establishments that have moved to annual system audits will automatically revert to a six monthly audit frequency if they no longer satisfy the eligibility criteria detailed above. The department will reserve the right to determine the audit frequency of all establishments to ensure it has the necessary assurances to maintain the integrity of certification.

Note – policy will be reviewed 12 months after implementation