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*Jr!* May 2018

*Dear Mr Mettrick,*

Thank you for your letter of 6 March to the Secretary of State about small slaughterhouses. I am replying as the Minister responsible for the welfare of animals at slaughter and I am sorry for the delay in doing so, but I needed to consult officials in the Food Standards Agency's Field Operation's team before responding.

I have read the report produced by the Sustainable Food Trust and was very interested to see the recommendations coming out of the report. An adequate network of slaughterhouses across the country is important in supporting livestock production in this country. The Government values the important role that a network of smaller local abattoirs plays in meeting the needs of producers of specialist livestock and those in the more remote areas of the country. I am conscious that there has been a decrease in the number of smaller abattoirs and realise that this is a matter of concern to industry and the local economy.

As the report mentions, various factors have combined to result in a substantial reduction in the number of smaller abattoirs, despite an overall increase in slaughtering capacity. The Government is nevertheless keen that an appropriate network of abattoirs continues to support sustainable livestock production on our exit from the EU. Part of this process is our plan to introduce the Agriculture Bill, and on 27 February 2018 the Government launched a consultation which sets out the policy framework for agriculture after the UK leaves the EU. The Agriculture Bill will enable us to support a thriving and self-reliant farming sector that is more competitive, productive and profitable and to protect our precious natural environment for future generations.

The requirements for ante-mortem inspection are set out in Regulation (EC) 854/2004 on the official control of products of animal origin. Whilst the legislation permits Official Auxiliaries to assist Official Veterinarians (OV) with the ante-mortem process, this is limited to an 'initial check and help with purely practical tasks' (Section III Chapter I). It is clear

that the an OV must be present during the ante-mortem inspection and take the final decision on whether animals are fit for slaughter.

Currently, the legislation is clear that all animals killed in approved slaughterhouses must have a veterinary ante-mortem; Regulation (EC) 854/2004 applying. If this does not take place, then Regulation (EC) 853/2004, Annex III, Section I, Chapter IV, Paragraph 5 applies. Where animals are slaughtered without ante-mortem inspection, the OV must declare the meat from such animals unfit for human consumption in accordance with the requirements of Regulation (EC) 854/2004, Annex I, Section II, Chapter V, Paragraph 1(a).

Regulation (EC) 854/2004 does not permit the use of CCTV. CCTV would not provide a clear enough image in my opinion for ante-mortem examination, unless of an exceptional quality. After the UK has left the EU, this may be something the Government will wish to consider, but as it would not be in compliance with EU legislation, it would exempt the meat from the animals being eligible for export to the EU.

The Government is delivering on its manifesto commitment to make CCTV recording in slaughterhouses mandatory. This reflected widespread concern following several well publicised cases of animal welfare abuse in slaughterhouses. These measures will maintain and improve animal welfare standards in all slaughterhouses and provide assurance that this is the case.

CCTV installations and their use will be proportionate to the size of premises and their throughput. In recognition that many of the businesses affected by this legislation are small businesses, the Government will allow a six month transition period from the coming into force of the legislation until enforcement provisions become operative to allow slaughterhouses time to install a suitable system.

*I am grateful to you raising these issues .*

*Yours sincerely .*

*John Gardiner*