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## **WRITTEN STATEMENT BY THE WELSH ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT**

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**Title:**           **Dissolution of the Meat Hygiene Service and merger with the Food Standards Agency**

**Date:**           **3 March 2010**

**By:**             **Gwenda Thomas , Deputy Minister for Social Services**

The Board of the Food Standards Agency (FSA) has decided to dissolve the executive agency status of the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) and to bring its staff and functions into the FSA to form the core of a new FSA Operations Group.

The MHS is an executive agency of the FSA and is responsible for verifying that operators of approved abattoirs, cutting plants and game handling establishments in Great Britain fulfil their responsibilities for the production of safe meat and the protection of animal health and welfare.

All of the FSA's operational delivery functions, including those of the MHS, will be merged together in a single Operations Group to derive a wide range of benefits, including:

- A consistent, strategic view of the enforcement of legislation relating to all Food Business Operators, irrespective of whether enforcement is undertaken by local or central government.
- A structure capable of better strategic delivery against external expectations and drivers – for example recommendations of the 2009 Report of the Public Inquiry into the September 2005 Outbreak of *E.coli* O157 in South Wales and recommendations of EU Food & Veterinary Office Missions.
- A more cohesive understanding of education and enforcement interventions that work in increasing Food Business Operator compliance with food hygiene regulations.
- Coordinated and consistent support to UK businesses in relation to compliance with official controls and other statutory requirements.

The Minister for Rural Affairs and I have indicated support for the FSA Board's decision. Health and Rural Affairs Ministers in England also

indicated their support and Ministers in Scotland noted the decision. In line with the process set out in Cabinet Office guidance, formal approval to dissolution of the executive agency status of the MHS has been granted by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and the Minister for the Cabinet Office. The MHS will be merged into the FSA on 1 April 2010.

The dissolution of the MHS will not create a risk to public health or animal health and welfare. All existing regulatory functions undertaken by MHS operational staff in approved meat premises are carried out on behalf of the FSA; they will continue to be undertaken by the same staff in the same way post-merger. Creation of the FSA Operations Group will increase the effectiveness of the FSA as a regulator in the longer term and reduce risk. The FSA calculates that savings of approximately £2 million will be generated through the merger.