

Animal Products (Overseas Market Access Requirements for Halal Assurances) Notice 2010

Report on Competency Development

Introduction

Over the last five years the production of Halal meat in New Zealand has come under increasing scrutiny by Islamic markets. There had been concerns expressed by some markets as to the sustainability and integrity of the system that was operating. Prior to 2010 New Zealand Government involvement in the Halal certification process had been minimal; however as a result of these growing market concerns it was clear that some Government intervention was necessary. The result has been the development of regulations which will govern the activity as well as the auditing and certification of it.

In 2009 a draft of these new regulations was circulated to stake holders and interested parties for review and comment. In February 2010 the *Animal Products (Overseas Market Access Requirements for Halal Assurances) Notice 2010* (hereinafter called the Notice) was signed off by the New Zealand Food Safety Authority (NZFSA).

A key element of the Notice is the requirement for competency, both at the meat plant level for Halal slaughtermen and also for those bodies who would certify this material.

As part of the development of the Notice, Unit Standards were created and registered on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework. This development was carried out under the supervision of the New Zealand Industry Training Organisation (NZITO) and the result of collaborative input. The individuals involved possessed wide ranging experience in meat industry operation and training and also an in-depth knowledge of Shariah (Islamic Law).

A number of individuals applied to NZITO to become assessors of these Unit Standards with NZQA and training commenced in late 2009.

The primary focus of the training has been Halal slaughtermen who are spread throughout the Meat processing plants all over New Zealand. Training courses were developed to meet the requirements of both the Halal slaughter Unit Standards as well as the advanced training required for the Certifier group who also need to show competency in order to function in this new environment.

This report is written to summarise the progress of this training and to highlight some of the pitfalls and challenges going forward.

Halal Slaughtermen training

As is the case for all delivery and assessment of Unit Standards which are registered on the National Framework, any individual with appropriate credentials can become an accredited assessor for those areas of expertise. In this regard it should be noted that only one group sought to develop such training and also gain accreditation as assessors for the requisite Unit Standards. This does present

an issue because the Notice requires Accredited Halal Organisations (AHO) to have capability to maintain and develop competencies in the operational side of Halal slaughter going forward.

The first wave of training focussed on the existing cohort of Halal slaughtermen already employed in the Industry. It can be reported that as at the time of publication of this report, approximately 350 individuals have been through the training and have been subsequently assessed against the required Unit Standards. The New Zealand meat companies have been extremely proactive in this regard and it can be reported that most will be compliant, in terms of competency by the Notice deadline.

An interesting development has been the attendance of non-Muslim plant supervisors and managers at training courses. This had not been anticipated at the early stages of course development and Notice implementation, but it is considered an extremely positive outcome. It has led to the enlightenment of the wider industry as to the requirements of Shariah for the production of Halal meat and meat products. Feedback already received from this group of non-Muslims as well as the Halal slaughtermen has been extremely positive about this aspect. Whilst there has been some criticism of this wider Shariah training the overwhelming feedback refutes this position. From an Islamic perspective this is also viewed as a good outcome as it falls into the category of making Da'wah (the obligation to explain Islam to non-Muslims).

The training course on offer to the meat industry initially focussed on three (3) Unit Standards.

Two of these were the Unit standards required in the Notice (Part 7 Clause 21 (2)):

- *25927 Produce Halal meat*
- *25926 Demonstrate knowledge of Shariah in relation to processing Halal meat and meat products*

The third Unit Standard is:

- *20644 Demonstrate knowledge of the Animal Welfare Act in relation to the meat processing industry.*

After it became apparent that there was a significant number of non-Muslims attending training a fourth Unit Standard was included and was awarded to the non-Muslim group instead of 25927

- *21623 Describe Halal slaughter requirements in the meat processing industry*

It is clear from the training and assessments already conducted that simply "being a Muslim" is not sufficient to be able to carry out this vitally important activity of Halal slaughter. There is knowledge and competency required that goes beyond the level of most Muslims not involved directly with this specialist activity. The significance of carrying out this function on behalf of the wider Muslim community is a matter that needs to be emphasised and reinforced to all practicing Halal slaughtermen. It has become apparent from the training already completed that there are still weaknesses in this competency level which will need to be addressed going forward, hence the responsibility placed on the AHOs to have an ongoing role in this regard.

Certifier and AHO Competency

The Notice also requires auditors and certifiers of the Halal system in New Zealand to achieve levels of competency and in this respect it mandates a number of advanced Unit Standards. A training course has been developed and assessors are available to carry out assessment. This course has been offered widely to the existing group of AHOs as well as the Compliance and Investigation Group (CIG) of NZFSA.

At the publication of this report NZITO have confirmed that only six (6) individuals have so far been accredited with these Unit Standards and they are all staff of the CIG group of NZFSA.

Full implementation of the Notice requires accreditation with these Unit Standards and so it is hoped that existing AHOs can be encouraged to gain these competencies as soon as possible.

As well as the Units already designated for Halal Slaughtermen the following are also required under Part 5 Clause 15 (1, 2) of the Notice:

- *25924 - Demonstrate knowledge of audit requirements in the certification of Halal meat and meat products*
- *26025 - Audit the production of Halal meat and meat products for certification*

An online assessment website using the Moodle platform has been developed and is available to assist in the gaining of these competencies.

Listing competent Halal slaughtermen and AHO personnel

At the early stages of Notice introduction there was a suggestion of issuance of Halal Slaughter ID cards to individuals deemed competent. The Notice in Part 7 Clause 21 (3) suggests that the Director General will maintain a List of competent slaughter persons, this should be considered as soon as possible and a List (Register) established and maintained for industry to access.

At present all individuals successfully completing the training and assessment have received attendance and competency certificates jointly issued by the NZITO and the training provider (see Appendix 1). This Certificate only relates to the completion of the required Unit Standards, it is emphasised that there may be additional criteria used to qualify individuals for the Register such as confirmation of being a practising Muslim and possibly adherence to standards of good Islamic practise.

Part 5 Clause 15 (3) of the Notice indicates that the Director General will also maintain a list of competent Halal assessment and certification personnel.

Review of NZQA Unit Standards

One of the benefits of operating competency standards using the NZQA model is the robust nature of this environment. Rigorous criteria are defined to ensure Unit Standards that are awarded to individuals carry credibility and value with them.

In this respect there has been a suggestion that the existing Unit Standards might require some revision. The process that exists for this to occur is well defined in the NZQA environment and a

public consultation process is required. Any review and revision of the Halal Unit Standards would be subject to this defined process.

As has already been noted, the people involved in the initial development of the Unit Standards were the highest Islamic authorities available in New Zealand, being recognised experts in Shariah and also members of Ulama of Scholars. It is expected that any changes made to the existing Unit Standards would refer to the same authority.

Recruitment of replacement Halal Slaughtermen

There will need to be a structured process of competency development associated with the recruitment process in the future. Historically recruitment for new Halal slaughtermen has not included a competency assessment. It is suggested that this matter should be addressed as soon as possible to ensure new slaughtermen have access to training and assessment very early on in their employment, possibly before going onto the NZFSA List of competent slaughtermen and Certifiers.

Halal Programmes

Part 4 Clause 14 of the Notice places a new requirement on meat companies to have approved Halal Programmes. For many there will already be Standard Operating procedures (SOPs) that can be modified and extended to meet the requirement under the Notice. It is also noted that at least two companies have taken the initiative to employ Muslims in their Quality Control function to assist with this activity.

Clause 14 dictates that AHOs must sign off these Halal Programmes for companies, however until competencies are achieved by this group it is hard to see how this process might be carried out meaningfully and effectively. This is a matter that should be addressed by the Regulator as soon as possible.

Acknowledgements

The support and assistance of the following in the development and delivery of the training provided thus far is acknowledged:

- Sheikh Mohammed Amir – Chair of Ulama, Imam of Wellington Mosque, Graduate in Islamic Shariah from Saudi Arabia
- Sheikh Mohammed Anwar Sahib, Imam Ataqwa Mosque , member of Ulama, Graduate in Islamic Shariah
- Sheikh Ahmed Zaoui, Graduate in Islamic Shariah
- Dr Mohammed Osman Elamein – UAE representative
- Taoufik Elidrissi – President Manawatu Muslim Association, Past Vice President of Federation of Islamic Associations of NZ (FIANZ), Past Halal supervisor NZIMM, Past member FIANZ Halal negotiating committee

Ross Davies

Director, Achieve Enterprises Limited

Glossary of Terms

- Qu'ran – the Holy book of Islam, the actual word of God
- Sunnah – traditions of Prophet Mohammed (pbuh), “what he said, what he did and what he agreed to”
- Ijmaa – Consensus opinion reached by Islamic scholars about new or previously unknown matters
- Shariah – Islamic law, this is derived from the Qu'ran, Sunnah and Ijmaa
- Da'wah – the obligation on Muslims to enlighten non-Muslims about Islam
- Ulama – Apolitical and independent group of recognised Islamic scholars charged with the responsibility of helping Muslim communities understand and interpret Shariah.
- Halal – permissible, allowed for use and or consumption by Muslims
- Haraam – forbidden
- Imam – Community religious leader

- AHO – Accredited Halal Organisation, organisations accredited by NZFSA under the Notice to carry out auditing and certification activities. Currently there are three AHOs which have been recognised because of their involvement in the previous Halal environment. Under the terms of the Notice new AHOs may well emerge to service the requirements of the meat export industry as well.



The image shows a certificate titled "Halal Competency in Meat Processing". At the top, it features the Arabic phrase "بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ" (In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful). The certificate is issued for a workshop held at "XXXX" from "23rd – 24th August 2010". The recipient's name is "XXXX.XXXXX XXXX". The certificate recognizes attendance and competency in three unit standards: 25926 (Islamic knowledge for halal production), 25927 (Halal meat production), and 20644 (Animal Welfare Act). The signature of Taoufik Elidrisi is present, along with the date and training provider information: NZ Islamic Training Board, PO Box 5555, Palmerston North. Logos for NZITO and a stylized green and orange emblem are also visible.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Halal Competency in Meat Processing

Workshop held at XXXX
23rd – 24th August 2010

XXXX.XXXXX XXXX

In recognition of attendance and competency in the following Unit Standards:

25926 Demonstrate knowledge of Shariah in the production and certification of Halal meat and meat products
25927 Produce Halal Meat
20644 Demonstrate knowledge of the Animal Welfare Act in relation to the meat processing industry

Signature: _____ Date: _____
Taoufik Elidrisi

Training provided by:
NZ Islamic Training Board
PO Box 5555
Palmerston North

