

# Halal Certification in the New Zealand Meat Industry

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## **Introduction**

*“O mankind! Eat of that which is Halal and Tayyib,”*

*Verse 168 Surat 2, Al-Baqarah (the Cow)*

This verse from the holy Qur’an is crucial in understanding Muslim concern about food. “Halal” is an Arabic word meaning lawful or permissible and “Tayyib” refers to the need for food to be nutritious and safe.

It is understandable then that Muslims have great concern that the foods they consume and products they use are ‘Halal’. Muslims must reject anything that contains or is contaminated by non-Halal products or ingredients; these are deemed to be ‘Haram’, which means that their consumption is prohibited under Shariah<sup>1</sup>. As more foods and biological products become multi-component there is increasing concern over the status of these components and additives. Accuracy and truth of labelling can be a problem especially with the view that many manufacturers are uninformed about the importance and rigidity of the Halal requirement. Processes of manufacture, which include animal slaughter, are additional elements that contribute to the status of the item, so there is a ever increasing need to provide assurance to Muslim consumers of the ‘Halal’ status of products they are going to consume or use.

The term ‘Tayyib’ adds another dimension to this requirement as it refers to the wider definition of what is “good food”, including the need for food to be safe and nutritious as well. In countries like New Zealand the concept of ‘Tayyib’ is well understood with food safety and truth of labelling being central elements in the production of all food especially food for export.

The question as to who should certify products and materials as ‘Halal’ and what competencies and processes are required needs to be answered. Due to uncertainty and lack of knowledge of the requirements of Halal, many food producers have traditionally passed this responsibility to local Muslim groups to manage. Until recently the New Zealand Government only played a limited role in this important process relying on industry to put in place mechanisms which ensured the robustness and sustainability of the activity.

## **Halal Certification in New Zealand**

Prior to February 2010, certification of meat products was undertaken by two (2) Islamic organisations, which serviced the key markets that New Zealand meat processors sought to supply. Islamic markets have become more structured and

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<sup>1</sup> Shariah – Islamic Law

diverse and as such increased pressure has come not only on the integrity of certification but also on the overall quality of product.

The involvement of commercial organisations in Halal certification, which confirms the Halal status of product to be exported, is not accepted by many Islamic countries including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). This restriction is stated in UAE procedures: GSM/32; Article 1, clause 8 dated 01/05/2005:

*“No commercial companies or individuals should be appointed to supervise Halal slaughtering in favour of the UAE”*

Conversely the ‘committee’ structure of some community groups raises accountability issues and potentially limits the opportunity for specific competencies to be developed. There is little doubt that competencies, both technical and commercial, are of great significance in the protection and enhancement of the New Zealand food export trade to Islamic countries.

There are some basic principles that underpin production of Halal products in New Zealand:

- Halal certification being a vital component of trade with Muslim countries is now viewed as a ‘country to country’ compliance matter and the New Zealand Government has oversight and involvement.
- No group or groups have a mandate or ownership of the Halal certification process. An element of contestability in the provision of these services is both possible and arguably desirable.
- Technical aspects of modern animal product and food production mean that Halal certifying agencies must have the technical competency to understand dynamic and ever-changing food production processes.
- Good practises are necessary in the provision of certification services. Audit competencies and structured traceable reporting systems are required to provide this transparency and assurance for all parties.

The structure for Halal certification in the New Zealand meat industry is shown in Figure 1.

### ***Oversight of Halal System***

A key aspect of the New Zealand Halal system is the involvement of the Government. NZ Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (NZ MAF), previously the NZ Food Safety Authority (NZFSA) is the Government agency involved. The advantage of Government involvement lies firstly with its independence and secondly its responsibility to act for New Zealand on the international stage. The *Animal Products Act 1999* is the legislation that covers this crucial area and under this the *Animal Products (Overseas Market Access Requirements for Halal Assurances) Notice 2010* outlines specific requirements for the Halal system.

NZ MAF has a proven track record and is well respected in world trade negotiations and in international human health agreements. NZ MAF has long been engaged in dialogue with Muslim countries on other matters of compliance, so it is logical that these existing relationships be used to agree on Halal certification matters as well.

Independent auditing of the Halal system is a key element of the regulatory environment. NZ MAF has a well developed internal audit function which ensures that all areas under its jurisdiction are operating consistently and with competency. The internal audit activity extends to the Halal system where certifiers accredited by NZ MAF will be audited as a condition of that accreditation. The New Zealand Government promotes such processes to the world as evidence of its integrity and transparency.

### ***Accredited Halal Organisation (AHO)***

Halal certifying organisations now come under the legislation and are accredited to operate in this area. AHOs do not directly enter into agreements with International Governments and their certification activities are closely supervised and monitored by NZ MAF using the mechanisms described previously.

The concept of “accreditation” is an important aspect which ensures the maintenance of competency and consistency. Agencies seeking accreditation must demonstrate ability to meet the strict requirements which in the case of the Halal certification include:

- Religious knowledge and integrity
- Commitment and evidence of support to Muslim communities
- Rigorous recruitment and training procedures
- Audit skills, including ISO17020
- Technical competency in food and biological processing
- Business and organisational integrity

### ***Halal Standards Advisory Council (HSAC)***

The legislation has established an advisory council to provide input on matters relating to the establishment and maintenance of a robust Halal system. HSAC does not have the authority to create legislation or policy but provides expert advice to the Director General of MAF or delegates on such matters.

The use of the ‘advisory group’ model is a well established tool in New Zealand governance areas. It recognises that expertise outside Government agencies is a valuable resource when legislation and policy are being developed. This is especially true when considering something as important as the Halal system.

### ***Halal Slaughtermen***

Under the new regulatory system for Halal meat production lines of accountability and responsibility have become much clearer. Even though Halal slaughtermen have always been employees of New Zealand meat companies, lines of accountability and responsibility have tended to be somewhat vague. This lack of clarity led to uncertainty about the responsibility for developing and maintaining competencies in this group. Competency is perhaps the most crucial element of a robust system, not only in Shariah but also in the process of Halal slaughter. The concept that being a

practising Muslim is all that is necessary to have the required competencies is flawed. It is only one element of the overall competency requirement, also required is an in-depth understanding of Shariah relative to slaughter and as well as knowledge of requirements related to export meat plant operations. Under the new Halal system responsibility for all training lies with the employer and there are well defined processes that apply.

The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) is an independent organisation with statutory obligations to administer and control competency standards in New Zealand by way of the Qualifications Framework. Unit Standards, which form part of this framework, are registered and become subject to independent scrutiny defined by the NZQA system.

In terms of Halal meat production the legislation endorses a number of Unit Standards in Shariah, Halal meat processing and auditing by making these a requirement for all Halal slaughtermen and certifiers. The Unit Standards have been designed with the assistance of religious scholars and experts in Halal meat production and have been subjected to external scrutiny prior to their acceptance as basic competency requirements for those people involved in producing and certifying Halal meat.

### ***Contracting Certification Services***

New Zealand strongly promotes a free market economy and monopolies are closely scrutinised to ensure the consumer is not disadvantaged. Legislation that governs Halal certification is no different and it clearly defines what prospective certifiers must do to gain accreditation and then offer certification services. The legislation expressly precludes the opportunity for individual groups to “own” the environment.

In the same context New Zealand meat companies are free to contract certification services by negotiating directly or collectively with AHOs both on delivery and cost.

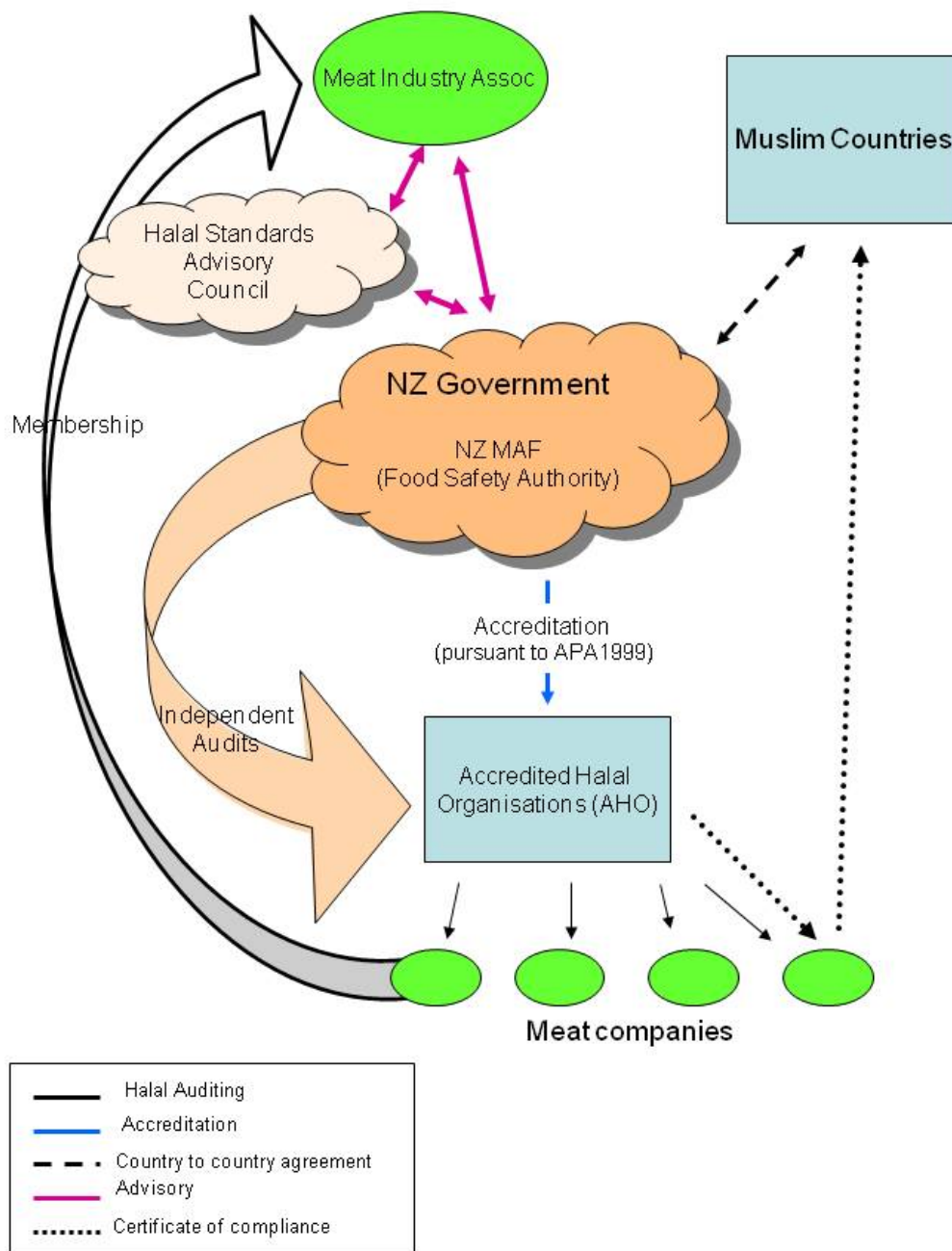


Figure 1

### Halal and Food Safety

There has been debate in some non-Muslim countries that Halal certification and food safety are separate issues and that Halal certification is purely a religious matter. By contrast in some markets it appears that the Halal tag is actually gaining traction as measure of food safety and not only as a religious endorsement. The main reason for this is growing global concern over the availability of safe food.

The concept that Halal certification is about overall quality and welfare is promoted widely, especially in the Islamic world.

- *Halal products are fast gaining world wide recognition as a new benchmark for safety and quality assurance. Products that are produced with Halal certification are readily acceptable by Muslim consumers as well as consumers from other religions. This acceptance is due to the wholesomeness concept of Halal, which covers not only the Shariah requirement, but also the hygiene, sanitation and safety aspects. Standards and Quality News, Malaysia; July - August 2004, Vol. 11 No. 4, ISSN: 1394-0198*
- *“Halal has now become a universal concept. Halal stands for just and fair business transactions, caring for animals and the environment, social justice and welfare. It is not limited to a concept, confined or restricted to the slaughtering of animals for consumption by a Muslim, but encompasses products and services of the highest quality to meet the ever increasing awareness and needs of consumers in a demanding global market,” says Nurliza Ramli – author of the article, “Halal – The New Global Market Force”.*

Demands for Halal branding are driven not only by the fast-growing Muslim population but also it seems by non-Muslim consumers who are seeking clean, healthy and safe food. The surge was especially evident during the outbreak of the bird flu virus in 2005.

According to the Malaysian Standard for Halal food production there is little doubt about the food safety linkage

*Malaysian Standard - MS 1500:2004  
Halal food fulfils the following conditions:*

1. *does not contain any ingredients that are najis<sup>2</sup> according to Shariah law;*
2. *is safe and not harmful;*
3. *is not prepared, processed or manufactured using equipment that is contaminated with things that are najis according to Shariah law;*
4. *does not contain any parts or products of animals that are non-Halal to Muslims or products of animals which are not slaughtered according to Shariah law;*
5. *the food or its ingredients do not contain any human parts or its derivatives that are not permitted by Shariah law; and*
6. *during its preparation, processing, packaging, storage or transportation, the food is physically separated from any other food*

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<sup>2</sup> Translation: Najis means Shariah identified contaminants which in Islamic worship render the food and drink non Halal

*that does not meet the requirements stated in items i), ii), iii), iv) or v) or any other things that have been decreed as najis by Shariah law.*

### **Concluding comments**

The production of Halal food makes up a significant proportion of New Zealand's current primary exports, with meat and dairy products providing the greatest contribution to the economy. In addition, New Zealand's geographic location places it in an ideal position to take advantage of a rapidly growing South East Asian Muslim market.

The integrity of the Halal system becomes all important, giving confidence to the Muslim consumer about the status of the product. Integrity can only be achieved by having independent oversight at the highest level and a robust system of delivery. New Zealand has become a world leader in this regard, establishing legislation to control the process and promoting this to its Islamic trading partners. In recognition of this approach NZ MAF received the award as the "**Best Service Provider**" presented at the **World Halal Forum** held in Malaysia, April 2011.