



Operational Policy

Meat Establishment Verification System (MEVS) - Abattoir Policy

1. Purpose

This policy provides a national approach to the Department of Agriculture inspection and verification of export registered abattoirs to support Australian Government health certification for export meat and meat products.

2. Scope

This policy applies to department officers who undertake inspection, verification and audit activities at export registered abattoirs.

3. Definitions

Term	Definition
Australian Government Authorised Officers (AAO)	Means a Meat Safety Inspector who is authorised under section 20 of the Export Control Act 1982 to perform the services for the purposes of AEMIS
Approved arrangement	As per the Export Control (Meat and Meat Products) Orders 2005, means an arrangement approved under clause 5 of Schedule 1 or under sub clause 22.1 of Schedule 7 and includes variation of such an arrangement in the circumstances specified in clause 17 of Schedule 1 or clause 27 of Schedule 7
Audit Management System (AMS)	The department's web-based record management system for holding on-plant verification records, non-compliance Issues corrective action requests , weekly meeting records and audit reports
Area Technical Manager (ATM)	Department veterinary officers who are responsible for the overall supervision of the On-Plant Management System and the OPVs/FSAs at export registered slaughtering establishments/independent boning rooms in a defined geographical location

Field Operations	A senior veterinary officer who has responsibility for
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Manager(FOM)	technical supervision of ATMs within and across defined geographic areas
Food Safety Meat Assessor (FSMA)	A department authorised officer who has meat inspection qualifications and works on export registered slaughtering establishments. The tasks undertaken by an FSMA is dependent upon the particular AEMIS model that the establishment runs
Non-compliance	A failure to comply with the approved arrangement, legislative or importing country requirements
On-Plant Veterinarian (OPV)	An authorised officer with veterinary qualifications registrable in a state or territory of Australia who is based on an export registered slaughtering establishment

4. Roles and Responsibilities

4.1. On-Plant Veterinarian

- i) A departmental veterinarian located at an export registered abattoir to verify that animal health, animal welfare, food safety, product integrity/certification and market access requirement outcomes are identified, delivered to comply with the occupier's approved arrangement
- ii) Operates within the Export Meat Program (EMP) and the Food Services Group (FSG)
- iii) Is supervised by and reports to an ATM
- iv) Report to the Assistant Director of Inspection Services on all matters relating to staffing, administration and work health and safety
- v) Have six key technical areas of responsibility:
 1. Ante-mortem inspection
 2. Post-mortem inspection verification
 3. Animal Welfare verification
 4. Food safety verification
 5. Product integrity and certification verification
 6. Importing country requirements verification
- vi) Undertake ante-mortem inspection in all abattoir types
- vii) Undertake pig ante-mortem inspection verification where applicable
- viii) Verify that the occupier complies with their approved arrangement
- ix) Ensure inspection and verification tasks are done at the correct frequency
- x) Ensure critical non-compliance by the establishment is handled and reported through the AMS Non-Conformance Issue (NCI) register and/or CAR records

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- xi) Review approved arrangement amendments and provide recommendations for approval to the supervisory ATM
- xii) Manage weekly meetings with establishment management
- xiii) Manage monthly periodic audit process
- xiv) Provide a weekly report to their supervisory ATM informing them of relevant issues relating to the 6 key areas of technical areas of responsibility
- xv) Maintain the Audit Management System (AMS) records
- xvi) Participate in the ATM supervisory visit
- xvii) OPV's performance is managed through the department's performance management scheme in line with the Department's Enterprise Agreement

4.2. Food Safety Meat Assessor

- i) Operates within the EMP-FSG
- ii) Supervised by the FSG Staff Resources Officer
- iii) Roving FSMAs undertake verification tasks under the direction of the OPV
- iv) On-line FSMAs undertake post-mortem inspection
- v) End-of-chain FSMAs undertake carcase-by-carcase assessment

4.3. Area Technical Manager

- i) Operates within the FSG Audit Services
- ii) Supervised by the Director Audit Services with technical oversight provided by the appropriate FOM.
- iii) Is assigned a group of export registered abattoirs and OPVs in a particular geographic area
- iv) Provides technical oversight of OPV inspection and verification
- v) Supervises OPVs through a combination of on-plant bimonthly Supervisory Visits and remote monitoring of AMS records and other department data management system records as required e.g. PHI and EPACS
- vi) Approval of CAR extensions
- vii) Manages rejected CARs.
- viii) Manages marginal and unacceptable OPV Monthly Periodic Audit outcomes
- ix) Approves the occupier's approved arrangement and/or any amendments made to it following recommendation from the OPV
- x) Assesses and approves changes to trade description
- xi) Undertakes performance management of OPVs under their supervision



4.4. Field Operations Manager

- i) Operates within the Export Meat Program
- ii) Supervised by the Assistant Secretary Food Exports Branch
- iii) Are responsible for technical oversight of a group of ATMs either within a
- iv) Liaise with FSG to enable effective implementation of the regulatory requirements to underpin export certification

5. Method

The Meat Establishment Verification System (MEVS) at abattoirs has two key components that are linked to specific legislative requirements of the Export Control Act 1982 and its subordinate legislation namely:

1. Ante-mortem: Inspection
2. Verification: post-mortem, food safety, animal welfare, importing country requirements and product integrity

These processes combine to underpin export certification of meat and meat products.

5.1 Ante-mortem Inspection

Ante-mortem inspection is regulated by Part 8 of the Export Control (Meat and Meat Products) Orders 2005

Specifically it is performed in accordance with Part 3, Clause 8 (Ante-mortem Inspection and Disposition requirements) and Schedule 3 (Ante-mortem and Post-mortem Dispositions) of the Australian Meat Standard

The purpose of ante-mortem inspection is to ensure the appropriate disposition is applied so that only animals fit for the purpose of producing meat and meat products for human consumption are slaughtered

The OPV undertakes ante-mortem inspection in accordance with the relevant departmental instructional material



5.2 Animal Welfare Verification

Animal welfare verification is performed to assess the effectiveness of the establishment's procedures and practices that are designed to minimise the risk of injury, pain and suffering to animals and cause the least practical disturbance to animals

OPVs undertake animal welfare verification in accordance with departmental instruction material

Animal welfare verification is undertaken:

- i) During ante-mortem inspection
- ii) Through weekly verification of animal handling during production (e.g. in lairage facilities, unloading, etc.)
- iii) During the weekly verification of slaughter floor procedures that encompasses both animal handling (i.e. knocking box/restraint procedures) and slaughter (i.e. stunning and sticking)
- iv) In accordance with departmental instructional material, OPVs report animal welfare incidents to the relevant State Regulatory Authority responsible for animal welfare legislation

5.3 Post-Mortem Inspection Verification

Part 3, Clause 10 of the Australian Meat Standard (ASA4696) stipulates the requirements for post-mortem inspection, correlation and post-mortem disposition

The Standard states that the outcome for post-mortem inspection and disposition is that unwholesome meat is excluded from the human food chain and disposed of separately

Schedule 2 of the Australian Meat Standard (AS4696) sets out the procedures that must be followed by a meat safety inspector

OPVs supervise post-mortem inspection in accordance with the relevant department instructional material and the responsibilities outlined in this policy

Post-mortem inspection verification is done by an OPV and/or a roving Food Safety meat Assessor (FSMA) as per departmental instructional material relevant to the species and the approved arrangement as it relates to Australian Government Authorised Officer (AAO)/FSMA activities



5.4 Food Safety Verification

Department verification of food safety is aimed at ensuring that the establishment procedures, required to maintain food wholesomeness, are working effectively through the application of HACCP and the associated Good Hygienic Practices (GHP)/ Pre-Requisite Programs including microbiological and residue surveillance programs

The frequency of food safety verification is dependent upon the procedure/process being monitored and market access requirements. MEVS food safety covers:

- i) HACCP plan CCPs
- ii) GHP/Pre-Requisite Programs
- iii) Sanitary Standard Operating Procedures (SSOPs)
- iv) Microbiological Testing Programs
- v) Residue Sampling Programs

5.5 Importing Country Requirements Verification

The outcome of market access requirement verification is that product intended for a particular market complies with all the requirements for that market

Importing country requirements are specified in the department MICoR database and changes to importing country requirements are notified to industry through Market Access Advices

The OPVs responsibility is their familiarity with the registered operations and specific overseas listings at their establishment to ensure verification of importing country requirements is effective

5.6 Product Integrity and Certification Verification

- i) Department verification of product integrity and certification requirements is to ensure that the establishment procedures and practices are meeting the required outcomes:
 - a. All incoming products are traceable back to the supplier and meat and meat products can be traced forward to facilitate recall if necessary
 - b. Product is accurately and permanently identified
 - c. Edible meat and meat products maintain their integrity and are kept separate from inedible or condemned meat products and by-products
 - d. Official marks are only applied to eligible product and official marks and seals are only used in accordance with the Orders
 - e. Meat and meat products are only exported from Australia when certification requirements are accurately met

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- ii) Product integrity and certification requirements include:
 - 1. Product traceability and recall
 - 2. Trade description
 - 3. Export Security/integrity
 - 4. Control of official marks
 - 5. Export documentation

6. Verification

- i) The aim of verification is to determine whether an establishment's operations are implemented, monitored, verified, controlled, recorded and amended in accordance with the details provided in the occupier's approved arrangement
- ii) The occupier's approved arrangement must comply with the relevant legislation, Australian standards and importing country requirements to ensure that meat and meat products are wholesome and fit for human consumption
- iii) In the context of the responsibilities of the OPV verification means:
 - a. Conducting inspections of meat and meat products at various stages of production
 - b. Measuring various parameters applicable to processing
 - c. Reviewing activities conducted and examining documents produced to assess compliance with the processes and outcomes detailed in an occupier's approved arrangement
- iv) Department verification activities are focused on:
 - Verification of establishment control of the implementation of the approved arrangement through the establishment's internal monitoring, verification and corrective action processes



6.1 Verification Outcomes

- i) Verification outcomes are rated on the basis of food safety, animal welfare, legislative compliance or market access requirements and the ratings will be one of the following:
1. Acceptable
 2. Marginal
 3. Unacceptable
1. Acceptable
An acceptable outcome will be recorded if the activity complies with the approved arrangement and there is no adverse impact on food safety, product wholesomeness, animal welfare, product integrity and/or importing country requirements
2. Marginal
A marginal outcome is considered a breach of compliance of the approved arrangement and a marginal rating would be given if there was potential to cause adverse affect on food safety, product wholesomeness, animal welfare, product integrity and/or importing country requirements
3. Unacceptable
An unacceptable rating would be applied if the non-compliance of the approved arrangement is reasonably likely to adversely affect food safety, product wholeness, animal welfare or product integrity
- ii) Where the verified activity is found to be marginal or unacceptable and the activity:
- a. Complies with the approved arrangement:
 - The department will require the establishment to review the relevant section of the approved arrangement to make appropriate amendments

or

 - b. Does not comply with the approved arrangement:
 - The department will require the establishment to bring the activity into compliance with the approved arrangement

or

 - c. Does not comply with the approved arrangement and compliance would not remove adverse effects, the department will require the approved arrangement to be reviewed for amendment and the activity to be brought into compliance with the amended approved arrangements

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- iii) All marginal and unacceptable verification outcomes must:
 - a. On completing the audit or the verification activity, be reported to the establishment management so that the establishment can take responsibility for corrective action i.e. the relevant production supervisor and the quality assurance officer
 - In the first instance this is done in person and then recorded in the AMS NCI Register and Weekly Meeting Agenda
 - b. Have corrective action taken by the establishment:
 - i) To prevent adversely affected product from entering commerce until it can be demonstrated that the product is safe and eligible for its intended use and intended market
 - ii) Where an animal welfare breach has occurred, the corrective action must involve immediate alleviation of suffering of any affected animals and immediate prevention of suffering to other animals
 - iii) Where establishment corrective actions are not effective, a department officer may apply an appropriate disposition to ensure the required outcome
- iv) The rules for dealing with marginal verification outcomes are:
 - a. The establishment is given one week to implement effective corrective action
 - b. If the corrective action by the establishment is found to be acceptable through department verification the issue is closed
 - c. If the corrective action by the establishment is found to be unacceptable a CAR is raised
 - d. Repetitive marginal findings i.e. – If more than two consecutive marginal verification outcomes are rated for an activity, this will result in the non-compliance issue being elevated to a CAR.
- v) An unacceptable department verification finding will result in a CAR

6.2 Corrective Action Requests (CAR)

- i) A CAR is raised through AMS for unacceptable verification outcomes or repetitive marginal outcomes
- ii) A CAR clearly states the legislative reference for the non-compliance and includes an accurate description of the overall findings, observations and any objective evidence collected to support the findings
- iii) A CAR is discussed between the department officer and a senior establishment representative and where possible agreed upon
- iv) Once the agreed close out date is determined both parties sign the CAR
- v) CARs are attached to the relevant AMS record and securely retained on department on-plant files
- vi) The documentation provided by the establishment as evidence of effective corrective action will be attached to the relevant CAR records

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- vii) The department officer who raised the CAR or their delegate will record their verification findings when closing out the CAR
- viii) A copy of the signed closed CAR is given to the establishment
- ix) The original closed CAR will be retained securely on department on-plant files
- x) General guidelines for CARs:
 - a. The maximum time permitted for CAR closure is one month, however depending on the nature of the CAR, a longer timeframe can be negotiated between the OPV and establishment management
 - b. Food safety and wholesomeness issue would have a short timeframe for close out
 - c. Product integrity issues or importing country requirement issues may have a longer timeframe for close out
 - d. CARs are either closed (acceptable) or rejected (unclosed)
- xi) Rejected CARs:
 - a. Indicate systemic non-compliance with the approved arrangement
 - b. Are referred to the ATM for final decision. The ATM can either accept the rejection or approve extension of the CAR
 - c. If the ATM approves rejection of the CAR then the associated monthly periodic audit is rated *unacceptable* and the ATM can issue a show cause letter asking the occupier why they should not recommend an additional Systems Audit
- xii) CAR extensions:
 - a. Are only granted on one occasion
 - b. Are based on written evidence from the establishment to support their claim
 - c. Are to be discussed with the establishment ATM
 - d. The final decision on whether an extension is granted is the responsibility of the establishment ATM

6.3 Weekly Meetings

- i) The OPV chairs a weekly meeting with establishment management
- ii) Issues relating to, but not limited to, ante-mortem inspection, post-mortem inspection, food safety, animal welfare, market access requirements and product integrity will be discussed
- iii) The meeting will be used as an opportunity to:
 - a. Discuss the results of the MEVS verification
 - b. Discuss results of PHI and PMV
 - c. Review corrective actions on unclosed non-compliance issues
 - d. Be the vehicle through which new Market Access Advice and Meat Notices are discussed

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- e. Convey other relevant department information to the establishment and vice versa e.g. resource issues and/or performance of AAOs/FSMAs
- f. Discuss any WHS issues impacting department on-plant officers
- iv) The department officer present at the meeting is responsible for minute taking. Once the minutes of the meeting are agreed between all parties the department officer and establishment representative will sign and date the minutes
- v) Then original copy of the signed minutes will be attached to relevant Weekly Meeting in AMS and securely retained in department on-plant files
- vi) At establishments where there is more than one shift, each OPV is responsible for ensuring that all meeting agenda items are added to the weekly meeting. Ideally:
 - 1. Both OPVs should attend the weekly meeting to ensure consistency
 - 2. The chair role is to be rotated between the OPVs

6.4 Monthly Audits

- i) MEVS operates a Monthly Periodic Audit (MPA) process
- ii) MPAs are managed through AMS by the OPV
- iii) The scope of the MPA is determined by the verification activities that are verified within the month. These are based on the AMS Verification Records
- iv) All Marginal and Unacceptable Verification Activities are transferred to the MPA Audit Findings under the associated Activity Type
- v) CARs raised in the month are attached to the MPA
- vi) The MPA is rated as Acceptable, Marginal or Unacceptable. Ratings are determined by the outcomes of the individual Audit Findings Activity ratings
- vii) The MPA is finalised in the last week of the month
- viii) The MPA audit report:
 - a. Contains a conclusion regarding the overall outcome for the month's verification activities
 - b. Contains a list of the Audit Findings
 - c. Contains associated CARs
 - d. Is presented and discussed with establishment management at the weekly meeting for the week in which it occurs
 - e. Hard copy is signed and dated by the OPV and a management representative
 - f. Follow up is undertaken through the weekly meeting process
- ix) Marginal and Unacceptable MPAs: Are considered a serious breach of an occupier's approved arrangement:

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- a. They indicate systemic non-compliance with the approved arrangement
 - b. The maximum number of marginal MPAs between Systems Audits is two
 - c. The maximum number of unacceptable MPAs between Systems Audits is one
 - d. The OPV must notify a senior company management representative that an MPA is likely to be rated Marginal or Unacceptable
 - e. Are escalated to the ATM for further assessment
 - f. The ATM can issue a show cause letter asking the occupier why they should not recommend an additional Systems Audit
- x) If both OPVs cannot be present, it is the responsibility of the OPV to give their apology and ensure that the chair (their delegate) has a comprehensive understanding of any issues to be raised at the meeting
 - xi) Where shift change over limits availability of both OPVs being present at the meeting other arrangements for weekly meeting formats can be negotiated between the establishment and the Establishment ATM
 - xii) A weekly report is sent to the Supervisory ATM advising them of key issues discussed during the weekly meeting

7. Policy Verification

- i) ATMs will verify OPVs management of this policy and underlying instructional material through remote monitoring of AMS records, PHI records and OPV Weekly Reports
- ii) ATMs will verify department records at the establishment during bimonthly supervisory visits

8. Records

- i) Records maintained within the MEVS include:
 - a. Verification Records
 - b. Weekly Meeting Agenda and Minutes
 - c. Weekly Report
 - d. NCI Register
 - e. CARs
 - f. Post-mortem Verification records
 - g. Ante-mortem Inspection records
 - h. Animal Welfare Incident Reports
 - i. Product Hygiene Indicator/Post-Mortem Verification records
 - j. Condemn Certificates
 - k. Suspect Cards
 - l. Emergency Kill Cards
 - m. Daily Kill Sheet Reconciliation

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- ii) All records directly related to verification are maintained on the AMS including Verification Records, NCI register, CARs, Weekly Meeting Minutes and Periodic Audits.
- iii) Hard copies of all relevant documentation relating to department on-plant inspection and verification activities are maintained securely in department on-plant files
- iv) Records relating to ante-mortem inspection (i.e. suspect cards, emergency kill cards, daily kill sheet reconciliation and condemn certificates) are kept as hard copies in department on-plant files

9. Related Materials/References

- i) Export Control Act 1982
- ii) Export Control (Prescribed Goods – General) Orders
- iii) Export Control (Meat and Meat Product) Orders
- iv) Australian Standard for the Hygienic Production and Transportation of Meat and Meat Products for Human Consumption (AS4696)
- v) Approved Arrangement Guideline – Meat
- vi) Department Instructional Material relevant to establishment operations (located on IML)
- vii) Regulatory Action and Sanctions – Export Meat Systems Sanctions Policy

12 Detailed Version History

Date Published	Version	Detail reason for issue or amendments	Document owner (Program)/ Developer/reviewers
30/04/2014	1	New policy document for to cover Departmental Meat Establishment Inspection and Verification activities at Abattoirs	Food Division- Export Meat - Samantha Allan - John Ryan - Jill Gordon
01/08/2014	2	Amendment to Section 6.1.iv.d – clarification of escalating a non-conformance issue to a corrective action request	Exports Division

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