

**Seanad Special Select Committee on the Withdrawal of the
United Kingdom from the European Union**

OPENING STATEMENT

Mr Joe Ryan
National Director for National Services

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GOOD AFTERNOON CHAIR AND MEMBERS MY NAME IS JOE RYAN AND I AM THE HSE NATIONAL DIRECTOR FOR NATIONAL SERVICES. I AM JOINED TODAY BY MY COLLEAGUE MS. ANN MARIE PART, ASSISTANT NATIONAL DIRECTOR FOR ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH. THANK YOU FOR THE INVITATION TO MEET WITH THE SELECT COMMITTEE TO DISCUSS CUSTOMS CHECKS AND TRADE FLOWS IN AND OUT OF THE IRISH PORTS.

The HSE Environmental Health Service is a regulatory inspectorate responsible for a broad range of statutory functions enacted to protect the health of the public. Under service contract with the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI), the Environmental Health Service (EHS) has responsibility for inspecting food imports of non-animal origin, arriving from outside the EU into Ireland, for compliance with EU food safety law.

In the interests of food safety and consumer protection, all EU Member States are obliged to enforce EU import control legislation on food and food contact materials.

EU Regulation 2017/625 requires specific foods imported into the EU to enter via border control posts (BCP) with specified minimum facilities.

In preparation for BREXIT, the HSE recruited and trained over 110 additional Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) and administration staff specifically for import controls at Dublin Port and Rosslare Europort border control posts (BCPs), and a 24/7 service is provided in both.

Inspections by Environmental Health Officers include document checks, physical checks and sampling of products. These controls are required by EU legislation, which sets the frequencies and parameters for inspections on a wide variety of foods, particularly those that the EU has designated as high risk to public health. Controls are required for example, on products for a range of both microbiological and chemical risks including, e.g. rice (for genetically modified organisms), spices and nuts (for mycotoxins) and sesame seeds (for salmonella) and there may be some products that are prohibited from entering the EU. The role of the HSE at the ports is to protect Ireland's food chain and the health of the consumer.

Since 2017, the HSE has been working closely with colleagues in Department of Health, Department of Agriculture Food and Marine (DAFM) the Revenue Commissioners and FSAI to ensure good co-operation between agencies on shared issues such as facilities management, information systems, joint inspections, and stakeholder communication.

Since 2018 the HSE has also been participating in numerous cross agency groups supporting and informing food businesses, importers and agents of the post BREXIT requirements. The UK's decision to leave the EU however means Ireland is now one of the first points of entry into the EU for GB products. This has presented significant challenges and new ways of working for many import businesses, and it is clear that despite early engagement, many importers did not anticipate the level of complexity on January 1st.

Many of the higher risk foods imported to the EU which must now be checked at Irish BCPs. have mandatory paperwork requirements which should be submitted electronically 24 hours in advance of arrival to allow for speedy transit through the ports; however, some businesses did not appear to be fully aware of this requirement in the early stages of BREXIT, which caused some delays.

Where insufficient/incomplete paperwork is submitted with a consignment there could be a delay in its release from the port if this paperwork is not provided in advance. A small number of consignments (100 in Quarter 1 -2021) must also be selected for physical exams and this process takes time, however EHOs regularly communicate directly with the importer regarding the status of their consignment.

If the HSE receives the correct paperwork for a consignment prior to its arrival in Ireland (and no physical exam is required), the EHO indicates to Revenue (while the consignment is still on the ferry), that no further HSE controls are required and the consignment can be released. However only Revenue can actually release a consignment from the port as there may be other agency checks required, depending on what mix of products may be in the consignment.

In the first quarter of 2021, the HSE undertook checks on almost 14,000 consignments between Dublin and Rosslare with over 11,000 of these consignments arriving from Great Britain. In the same period in 2020 checks were completed on 891 consignments. The vast majority of these consignments were cleared for release.

The HSE regularly meets and proactively works with importers, agents, hauliers and food businesses in cases where difficulties have been identified. A dedicated, EHS Business Liaison Group has been established for this purpose alongside dedicated email addresses in Dublin and Rosslare which are monitored 24/7.*

This wide engagement and business focused advice has led to a better understanding of procedures, leading to further compliance and reduced transit times through the ports.

In conclusion, with UK now outside of the EU it is not possible to have the same automatic free flow of foods through the ports as before. The HSE recognises industry challenges and remains committed to working together with other regulatory agencies, port authorities and industry representatives to ensure smooth and effective transition of goods through the ports whilst also ensuring compliance with EU food safety legislation.

Thank You

* The dedicated email addresses are importcontroldublin@hse.ie and importcontrolrosslare@hse.ie depending on the port of arrival.

Information and support for businesses importing foods of non-animal origin can be found at www.fsai.ie