

**REPORT TO: ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES COMMITTEE ON 20 APRIL 2005**

**SUBJECT: PRODUCTION OF "SMOKIES" - CONVICTION OF JULIAN JONES**

**BY: DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES**

**1. Reason for Report**

- 1.1 The report asks the Environmental Services Committee to note the outcome of the court case against Mr Julian Jones which was reported to the Procurator Fiscal by the Environmental Health Section.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to the Committee in terms of Section D (37) of the Council's Administration Scheme relating to Environmental Health.

**2. Background**

- 2.1 In December 2000 Northern Constabulary stopped a vehicle on the A9 heading south as it was being driven erratically. On inspection the rear section of the vehicle was found to contain 253 sheep carcasses and 258 sheep heads which were identified as "smokies". Smokies are old thin sheep which have been shorn, but the skin is left on. The skin is then blow torched to give a golden brown colour to the carcass and a smoky flavour favoured by some West African and Caribbean communities. The two men in the vehicle gave false names and addresses to the police, but one of the men, who was later confirmed to be Julian Jones, indicated he frequented a farm in Moray namely Backies Farm, Deskford.
- 2.2 Officers from the Moray Council Environmental Health Section thereafter made several regular visits to Backies Farm Deskford and other farms under suspicion but no evidence of illegal slaughter was found until December 2002.
- 2.3 As rumours persisted that illegal slaughtering was being carried out in Moray and Aberdeenshire multi-agency meetings were held on a regular basis involving The Moray Council, Aberdeenshire Council, Grampian Police, The Food Standards Agency, The Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department and the SSPCA to consider contingency plans for dealing with an incident should it arise. No case of this kind had been taken to court before, the procedures and legislation were not issues officers had to deal with on a regular basis, and colleagues in England and Wales who had some experience of criminal gangs involved in illegal meat scams warned that some individuals may be violent.
- 2.4 The multi-agency meetings were invaluable in that they ensured all agencies were better prepared. Grampian Police also alerted other Scottish Police forces and issued guidance procedures should any force encounter smokies.

- 2.5 On 20<sup>th</sup> December 2002, Environmental Health received information from a member of the public that smoke could be seen rising from an outbuilding at Backies Farm, Deskford. The informant had been in the vicinity of Backies Farm as he suspected that Julian Jones had stolen some of his sheep and taken them there and out of curiosity as he had heard rumours of illegal slaughtering being carried out at Backies Farm.
- 2.6 Following receipt of the information a visit was made to Backies Farm by officers of the Environmental Health Section, Grampian Police and a representative from the Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department.
- 2.7 On arrival at the farm, officers met a man who initially identified himself as John Davies but later admitted to being Julian Jones. He was advised that information had been received that illegal slaughtering was being carried out on the farm and that the officers present wished to inspect the outbuildings to ascertain whether there were any contraventions of food safety or animal health and welfare legislation. Julian Jones agreed to co-operate with the investigation and stated that anything found on the farm was entirely his responsibility.
- 2.8 On approaching the outbuildings officers could see that one of the buildings was lit up and liquid petroleum gas cylinders could be seen. Clear evidence of slaughtering was found including sheared and charred wool, blood, faeces and dirt on the floor. Gas cylinders were splattered with blood and a captive bolt was also found along with three buckets containing sheep feet and windpipes.
- 2.9 The conditions found in the area where the slaughtering was carried out were totally unacceptable. The walls were filthy, the floor was awash with blood and heavily soiled with faeces, burnt wool and dirt. A consignment of 39 live shorn sheep were also found in the same building awaiting their fate.
- 2.10 A blue LDV Convoy van which was parked nearby was found to contain 62 carcasses and heads. The vehicle was unrefrigerated and in a dirty condition.
- 2.11 As the carcasses were unfit for human consumption they were seized in terms of the Food Safety Act 1990 and were subsequently ordered to be disposed of by a Justice of the Peace. The carcasses were stained and retained in a frozen condition as evidence.
- 2.12 During the investigation Julian Jones stated he produced smokies all over the country to supply butchers shops in London, Birmingham, Manchester, Bradford and Bristol where there are large West African and Caribbean communities.
- 2.13 Due to the serious nature of the offences and the risk to public health the matter was reported to the Procurator Fiscal on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2003.
- 2.14 Julian Jones has a history of animal welfare and food safety offences in England and Wales. He was banned for life by a Welsh court in 1999 from having custody of any animal and in December 2004 he was fined and given a community service order by Haringey Crown Court following the seizure of 200 smokie carcasses and 70 decomposing sheep heads in June 2002.

- 2.15 Julian Jones was sentenced to 6 months imprisonment at Elgin Sheriff court on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2005 after pleading guilty to five charges.
- 2.16 This was the first food fraud case involving illegal slaughter of animals for food in Scotland. The case was of national interest and has received extensive media coverage throughout the UK.
- 2.17 Julian Jones is just one link in a meat scam supplying illegally slaughtered sheep as smokies to some London Boroughs and other English cities and the Environmental Health profession is committed to stamping out this dangerous and illegal trade. Gangs involved in the trade have close links throughout the UK.
- 2.18 Meat crime was becoming a crime of choice for career criminals as the financial gain is so great and the fines are no deterrent. It is hoped that the imposition of a custodial sentence will serve as a warning to criminals involved in meat scams and have repercussions for the national situation in relation to meat crime.
- 2.19 Environmental Health, although having limited staff resources, felt it was in the public interest to devote resources to the issue to bring the matter to court. Moray is an area with highly reputable agricultural and meat industries whose national and international reputations could have been affected if such illegal practices were allowed to continue.
- Julian Jones was not a licensed slaughterman. Examination of the sheep heads found in the van indicated that the majority had not been stunned prior to slaughter.
  - The unsatisfactory unhygienic conditions associated with the slaughter, preparation and transportation of the smokies exposed the meat to the risk of contamination which may be capable of causing disease such as E Coli 0157, salmonellosis and cryptosporidiosis.
  - The sheep carcasses were not inspected by a vet before or after slaughter as legally required. There was evidence that some of the carcasses showed signs of arthritis, pneumonia and emaciation. The carcasses also contained specified risk material (SRM) i.e. spinal cord and spleen. Sheep heads were also supplied to the public and they too are specified risk material (SRM).
  - The requirement to remove SRM is a risk reduction measure. Although Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathy (TSE) has not been found naturally occurring in sheep, there is a risk that TSE has occurred as some sheep were fed the same type of feed that is thought to have caused Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) in cattle.
- 2.20 Following Moray Council's involvement and expertise in the issue of illegal slaughter James McLennan, Principal Environmental Health Officer was invited to become a member of the Illegal Meat Task Force which was set up by the Food Standards Agency in 2003. Training on all aspects of illegal meat issues has been provided and when called upon Mr McLennan will assist other local authorities in Scotland by providing advice and guidance. All costs incurred to Moray Council on such incidents will be refunded by the Food Standards Agency.

### **3. The Proposals**

3.1 The Committee is asked to note:

- i) the outcome of the court case against Julian Jones following a referral to the Procurator Fiscal by Environmental Health
- ii) that this case is the first prosecution for food fraud involving illegal slaughter of animals for food in Scotland.
- iii) the commitment made by Environmental Health to bring the matter to court, to protect public health.
- iv) the contribution made by other agencies, local authorities, Sections and the public in bringing the matter to a conclusion.

**4. Financial Implications**

- 4.1 Significant costs were incurred due to staff being committed to deal with these illegal meat issues and for the retention of evidence.

**5. Staffing Implications**

- 5.1 It was decided to devote significant staff resources to bring this matter to court as there were considerable risks to public health and the agricultural and food industries. Rumours of illegal slaughter have continued since the 2002 incident and staff resources continue to be devoted to surveillance and intelligence gathering which impacts on the ability to achieve other statutory responsibilities. Such activities are not recognised in the statutory PIs nor are they contained in the Food Standards Agency Framework Agreement on Local Authority Food Law Enforcement which is subject to audit.

**6. Environmental Implications**

- 6.1 The elimination of such activities has a positive effect on the environment.

**7. Sustainable Development Checklist**

- 7.1 The elimination of illegal meat production will have a positive impact on sustainability with economic, environmental and community benefits.

**8. Consultations**

- 8.1 No formal consultations have taken place in relation to the preparation of this report. However it is acknowledged that the early and regular consultations with the following agencies were vital in securing a successful outcome: Grampian Police, Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department, Aberdeenshire Council, Highland Council, The Food Standards Agency, SSPCA, The Moray Council's Legal Section, the Procurator Fiscal, Environmental Health colleagues in certain London Boroughs and Ceredigion County Council and the general public.

**9. Corporate Plan**

- 9.1 The content of this report complies with the aims and priorities contained in the Environmental Programme by maintaining a safe clean pleasant and sustainable environment.

**10. Recommendations**

**10.1 The Committee is asked to note:**

- i) the outcome of the court case against Julian Jones following a referral to the Procurator Fiscal by Environmental Health**
- v) that this case is the first prosecution for food fraud involving illegal slaughter of animals for food in Scotland.**
- vi) the commitment made by Environmental Health to bring the matter to court, to protect public health.**
- vii) the contribution made by other agencies, local authorities, Sections and the public in bringing the matter to a conclusion.**
- viii) that there is a need to maintain vigilance to deter further incidences.**
- ix) that the commitment to deal with such activities is not recognised in statutory PIs nor in the Food Standards Agency Audit.**

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Background Papers:  
Ref: DMcK/hml