Dear Mr Birchall,

LIVE EXPORTS

Thank you for your letter of 12 July to George Eustice concerning events at Ramsgate port on 11 July. I have been asked to reply.

Although your account of events is accurate in parts, there are some unfortunate errors. The vehicle in question was a three tier vehicle, not a four tier vehicle. Trading Standards were contacted by the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency (AHVLA) and their officers interviewed the driver. No lame sheep were 'missed' by the AHVLA inspector at the unloading of the sheep at the contingency premises. The supervised loading did take place and at that time there were no welfare concerns relating to the sheep. Upon inspection of the unloaded sheep at the contingency premises, five were found to have minor injuries consistent with limbs having temporarily slipped between the side of the vehicle and the second and third platforms. From an animal welfare perspective, there is therefore little similarity between events at Ramsgate port on 12 September 2012 and the events on 11 July this year.

As regards whether RSPCA inspectors discovered the problem with the vehicle before or after AHVLA inspectors, this is of no major significance. However I am able to confirm that AHVLA inspectors implemented their hot weather procedures and undertook a check of the drinking and ventilation systems on both of the vehicles that were presented for export on Friday. I am able to advise that during the temperature and water check of the vehicle in question, the inspectors had no welfare concerns at that time. The second of the two vehicles due to be exported that day was selected for a veterinary check and during that check, the RSPCA alerted AHVLA inspectors that they had witnessed legs protruding from the first vehicle when it arrived at the port. The AHVLA inspectors then carried out a full veterinary check of the vehicle, at which point the concerns raised by the RSPCA were verified and appropriate action was taken by the AHVLA inspectors to prevent the onward journey of the vehicle.

As regards your queries on whether anyone is to be charged for offences in relation to events on 11 July, this is a matter for Kent County Council.
Defra has informed the French and Dutch authorities of the non-compliances involving the welfare of the sheep and the vehicle, in line with the requirements of Article 26(2) of Council Regulation (EC) 1/2005.

Yours sincerely,

Mark Plowright
Defra - Customer Contact Unit