



Food industry united on second anniversary of Morecambe Bay

Release date: 5 February 2006

Food industry appeals to Prime Minister - “help prevent another Morecambe Bay, end the delay on gangmaster law”

On the second anniversary (Sunday 5 February 2006) of the death of 23 cockle pickers at Morecambe Bay, leading UK food retailers (including Asda, Tesco, Sainsbury’s and Waitrose) have joined forces with trade unions, labour providers and farmers to urge the Prime Minister to ensure immediate and comprehensive implementation of a new law aimed at preventing abuse of an estimated 600,000 temporary workers – and a repeat of the Morecambe Bay tragedy.

Failure to agree on the scope of the Act this will lead to a significant delay in implementing these new protections for vulnerable workers.

The full text of the letter is as follows:

Dear Prime Minister

Two years ago today, 23 Chinese workers lost their lives while picking cockles on the sands of Morecambe Bay. Following this tragedy a unique coalition of retailers, manufacturers, farmers, packhouses, trade unions, community groups and labour providers themselves worked with Government to bring in the Gangmasters Licensing Act (2004). The Act contains important measures that will help to tackle the activities of illegal Gangmasters and help prevent such a tragedy happening again.

However, the protracted uncertainty over which businesses will be covered by the Act is threatening the effectiveness of the legislation and risks causing significant delay. If this is to be avoided, Government this week must make important decisions.

The food industry is united in its view that exclusions from the Act must be kept to a minimum: 44 out of 48 respondents to the recent consultations take this view. This is also something Ministers agreed during the passage of the draft legislation.

We urge you to make it clear to all Departments that your Government’s policy with regard to this Act is unambiguous: exclusions must be kept to a minimum; food processing must not be removed from the scope of the Act and the timetable for issuing licences must be adhered to.

We sincerely hope that you will take the opportunity of this important anniversary to restate your commitment to this new law so that we can move forward, united in our resolve to tackle the serious abuse of workers by illegal labour providers.

Yours sincerely

Dan Rees, Chair, Temporary Labour Working Group and Director, Ethical Trading Initiative
Brendan Barber, General Secretary, Trades Union Congress
Mark Boleat, Chairman, Association of Labour Providers

Tim Bennett, National Farmers' Union
Paul Kenny, Acting General Secretary, GMB Trade Union
Tony Woodley, General Secretary, Transport and General Workers Union

Andrew Opie, Food Policy Director, British Retail Consortium
Douglas Pattie, Technical Advisor, Fresh Produce Consortium
Jim Sheridan MP (Sponsor of the Gangmasters Licensing Bill)
Lord Dennis Carter (Supported the Gangmasters Licensing Bill through the House of Lords)

Martin Beaumont, Group Chief Executive, The Co-operative Group
David Gregory, Head of Food Technology, Marks and Spencer
Justin King, Chief Executive Officer, Sainsbury's Supermarkets Ltd
John Longworth, Company Secretary, Asda
Steven Esom Managing Director, Waitrose
Lucy Neville-Rolfe, Company Secretary, Tesco
Stephen Ridge, Technical Solutions Director, Somerfield
Paula Cooper, Group Communications Manager, Geest Limited
Daniel Kingdon, Technical Manager, Mack Services
Robert Langmead, Chief Executive Officer, Natures Way Foods
Robert Schofield, Chief Executive, Premier Foods
Clive Woolley, Grampian Country Food Group
Jane Betts, National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux
Phil Bloomer, Director, Campaigns and Policy, Oxfam GB
David Ould, Director, Anti-Slavery International
Rosey Hurst, Director, Impactt

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