



## AIC Trade Assurance Complaint Investigation Process

### 1. Objectives

To maintain the integrity of the AIC certification schemes, the AIC has a defined complaint process for reporting and investigation of:

- Issues or concerns relating to certificated sites and companies which appear not to be maintaining the requirements of an AIC Scheme
- Complaints against the performance of the certification body or an auditor
- Complaints against the outcome of a specific audit

AIC wants to know when things seem to be going wrong, that way we can take action to solve any issues. Problems with the operation and implementation of the trade assurance schemes could represent a risk to feed/ food safety which could affect whole industry.

### 2. Ways to Contact AIC

- Call the AIC Trade Assurance Helpline on 0870 300 0532. A message may be left outside of office hours and we will call you back as soon as possible.
- Alternatively complete the Tell AIC form and email to [enquiries@agindustries.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@agindustries.org.uk)

### Confidentiality

**In order to investigate a complaint thoroughly we will normally require details of the person submitting the complaint (our investigation may raise additional questions we need to discuss) but they will not be disclosed unless requested by the person/ company submitting the complaint.**

**Details of the complaint and company/ site involved will not be disclosed to any other customers or users of the site concerned.**

### 3. Receipt of complaints

Anyone with concerns regarding a company certified to an AIC scheme or the performance of the certification body or an auditor may contact AIC in confidence.

All sites will also receive a feedback invitation after their audit. Where appropriate, comments made on these responses will be followed up as complaints under this procedure.



Where sites believe that the certification body has not handled an appeal against raised non-conformities correctly, this may also be raised with AIC.

Where concerns are raised regarding a certified company or site the key information required to allow a meaningful investigation is:

- Name and address of certified company/ site
- Nature of the issue
- The circumstances surrounding the issue and how you became aware of it
- Whether these concerns should have been evident during a routine audit or whether practices of the site have since changed

The Tell AIC form is helpful in capturing and recording this information.

There must be sufficient information to allow a thorough investigation, where this is not the case, AIC will ask for further details. If sufficient detail is not available at the time, AIC will use the data as intelligence and collate with information from other sources which may help in future trending and/ or investigations.

#### 4. Investigation

The nature of the complaint will be assessed by the Scheme Technical Manager and the action taken may include any combination of the following:

- Notification to the certification body for investigation and reporting back to AIC.
- Further action to be taken such as a site visit (by the certification body and/ or AIC)
- Contact to the site via the certification body/ AIC to gain further information
- Witness audit/ additional training of auditor

**Note: Complaints may take up to 90 days to conclude.**



The investigation and response shall focus around the main areas:

- Shortfalls in the audit process e.g. where this had failed to identify non-conformities in a participant's operation to the scheme(s) and where appropriate the corrective actions taken to address this.
- Concerns regarding the undertaking of the audit process by the auditor or certification body.
- Action taken to review the certification status of the site concerned. This may be through documentation, discussion or a revisit (announced or unannounced as outlined with the relevant Standards protocols) as appropriate to the nature of the issues identified.

The site will:

- Be informed that a complaint has been made regarding their certification and they shall be made aware of the complaint procedure. **They will not be informed of the source of the complaint.**
- Be made aware of the appeals procedure

**Note: Any decision for action e.g. suspension or withdrawal of the certificate will be based only on the findings from the investigation by the certification body and AIC and not directly from the complaint.**

#### 5. Follow up once a complaint is concluded

The AIC will review the results of all investigations and where necessary discuss further any issues arising. Where further clarification of the original issues raised are needed the AIC will discuss these with all relevant parties.

A summary of the investigation report and action taken by AIC and the certification body will be provided by AIC to the person originally submitting the complaint.

The AIC shall review all of the information provided and make a judgement on whether the complaint indicates a fault with the certification body. Where the original complaint information provided was insufficient to enable proper investigation the certification body will be notified of the issue but no conclusion can be made on the validity of the complaint.

Where the investigation determines that there is fault with the certification body involved, the AIC will make their accreditation body aware of the faults in the certification body's performance to enable further follow up as necessary by the accreditation body.



The AIC will maintain a log of all complaints and their outcome.

A summary report of the number of complaints received and their outcome will be provided for discussion at the relevant meetings such as the Feed & Food Assurance Steering Group, The FIAS Steering Group and the scheme working groups. Details of the individual complaints, person referring the issue and certification body concerned will not be disclosed.

## 6. Confidentiality of Information

Information relating to complaints remain strictly confidential except as identified in this procedure.

Documentation provided to the AIC during the investigation e.g. audit report will not be provided to any other persons unless prior permission has been given by the documentation owner.

The AIC will maintain files relating to the complaint process as confidential files.