

## Australian News

### **New food agency consults with industry councils**

Consumers and industry will contribute to the direction of Australia's first integrated food safety agency, the NSW Food Authority (NSWFA). A Meat Industry Consultative Council and a NSW Seafood Industry Conference have been established to provide input on food safety schemes, the key tool that keeps food safe for human consumption and will brief the NSW Minister for Primary Industries Ian Macdonald on industry developments and community concerns. The Minister is examining the structure of a third group, the NSW Dairy Industry Conference, which has served the dairy industry for 20 years. As the NSWFA increases its activities in other sectors, such as plant products, eggs, hospitals and aged care facilities, catering businesses, food service and food retail, future committees may be established to represent those industries. Inaugural meetings of the Meat Industry Consultative Council and the NSW Seafood Industry Conference were held on 12 May and 5 May respectively.

### **New food agency cracks down on imported prawn labelling**

The NSWFA handed out 88 official warnings to seafood outlets from May 7 to June 9 as part of a crackdown on the incorrect labelling of imported prawns. The NSWFA inspected 253 retailers on the Far North Coast, Newcastle, Far West, Sydney, the Mid West, Wollongong and South Coast regions. Of these, 187 retailers were selling imported prawns and 47% of those retailers had not labelled prawns as being imported. Those businesses were given seven days to comply with labelling standards or face possible penalties of up to \$55,000 for individuals and \$275,000 for corporations. The NSWFA can seek penalties under the NSW Food Act 2003 if retailers are found to have improperly labelled food. Where there is a likely known danger or risk of damage to health, the NSWFA can also seek a gaol term of up to two years and double the penalties. NSW Minister for Primary Industries Ian Macdonald said the crackdown was about protecting the livelihood of hard-working Australian seafood industry operators and the reputation and sustainability of the local industry. He said the issue of imported products was also addressed at the recent Primary Industries Ministerial Council in Adelaide where State and Territory Governments and the Commonwealth agreed to boost surveillance and enforcement within the seafood industry Australia-wide, through a coordinated campaign. A fact sheet on imported seafood labelling is available at <http://www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/pages/10.fact-sheets.htm>.

### **State Government warns of heavy fines for fish substitution**

Companies that deliberately or accidentally dupe seafood consumers by selling them the wrong species of fish could be hit with hefty new fines. NSW Minister for Primary Industries Ian Macdonald said the practice of "fish substitution" was a sad reality, despite the majority of legitimate operators doing the right thing. Fines of up to \$55,000 for individuals and \$275,000 for corporations now apply under the Food Act 2003. The issue of fish substitution was highlighted in a survey released by Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) titled "A pilot survey on the identity of fish species as sold through food outlets in Australia". The NSWFA has embarked on an industry-wide education program to help stamp out the practice of fish substitution and operators are urged to keep clear and accurate records as this protects legitimate operators and helps to target those doing the wrong thing. A fact sheet on fish substitution is available at <http://www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/pages/10.fact-sheets.htm>.

### **Minister says one step forward, two steps back for national food policy**

Australian food and drink manufacturers will soon gain lucrative new markets after State and Territory Ministers agreed to broaden the types of food that can be fortified with key vitamins and minerals. NSW Minister for Primary Industries Ian Macdonald said expanding the types of foods that can be fortified is a win for consumers and manufacturers, enhancing consumer choice and boosting market potential for Australian manufacturers. However, Mr Macdonald said the industry would suffer from a decision to reverse the position of the December 2003 Australia New Zealand Food Regulation Ministerial Council that maintenance claims (e.g. claiming a food maintains normal cholesterol) should not be heavily regulated. More information is available at <http://www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/pages/0.6.whats-new.htm>.



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### New food agency advises on nitrofurans in honey

Nitrofurans are a group of antibiotics that have been banned for use in food production in Australia since 1992. As far as the NSWFA is aware, no Australian beekeepers use nitrofurans and pure Australian honey remains free of it. In 2003 and 2004, media outlets reported Australian honey being pulled off shelves by Canadian authorities due to the presence of nitrofurans. The products recalled contained imported honey which was blended with Australian product. In April 2004, the NSWFA undertook a small sample survey of honey available on the market. From the 10 samples that were tested, three samples tested positive for nitrofurans residues. Although FSANZ has assessed the risk to public health as not significant, the presence of such residues is in breach of the Australia and New Zealand Food Standards Code. The NSWFA is responsible for enforcing all aspects of the Food Standards Code, NSW Food Act 2003 and the state's food safety schemes. The NSWFA is continuing to sample honey to analyse for nitrofurans residues, including honey used as an ingredient in the manufacture of other foods. Where samples test positive for the presence of nitrofurans, the NSWFA will contact the companies involved to request corrective action and advice on the company's intended course of action. The NSWFA concurs with FSANZ that a full recall is not justified on the results obtained to date but wishes to emphasise that continued sale of honey containing nitrofurans constitutes an offence. A fact sheet on nitrofurans is available from FSANZ at [www.foodstandards.gov.au](http://www.foodstandards.gov.au).

### New food agency advises on dioxins in food

Dioxins are a group of chemical compounds which can accumulate in the body fat of animals and humans and have a tendency to remain unchanged for prolonged intervals. Long term high levels of exposure to dioxins have the potential to cause a range of toxic effects in animals and humans. The Commonwealth Department of Environment and Heritage released a report as part of its National Dioxins Strategy, "Dioxins in Australia: A Summary of the Findings of Studies conducted from 2001 to 2004" on Friday 28 May 2004. The report is available for viewing, along with information on the National Dioxins Program, at [www.deh.gov.au/industry/chemicals/dioxins](http://www.deh.gov.au/industry/chemicals/dioxins). The report suggests that the risks in Australia from dioxin-like chemicals are low and that ambient levels in the environment are among the lowest in the world. FSANZ conducted the part of the study specific to food and found dioxin levels in food in Australia are very low and that the low risk to public health and safety does not warrant introducing specific maximum levels for dioxins in the Food Standards Code. Although the studies did not raise issues of public health or regulatory compliance relating to food, the NSWFA would support NSW or national government initiatives to further reduce human exposure to dioxins and strengthen the clean and green image of Australian food products. A fact sheet on dioxins in food and the report conducted by FSANZ are available from FSANZ at [www.foodstandards.gov.au](http://www.foodstandards.gov.au)

### Help available on food business notification

The Food Standards Code requires that all food businesses in NSW notify the NSWFA of their food activity details. Since April 2004, new fines of up to \$55,000 for individuals and \$275,000 for corporations can be imposed for a business that has not notified the NSWFA of their activity. NSW businesses can notify the NSWFA by Internet notification, which is fast, free and provides an instant Certificate of Confirmation; or paper notification, which incurs a charge of \$55. More information is available by contacting the NSWFA Notification Help Desk on 1300 650 124 or visiting the Internet site [www.foodnotify.nsw.gov.au](http://www.foodnotify.nsw.gov.au). A fact sheet on food business notification is also available at <http://www.safefood.nsw.gov.au/pages/10.fact-sheets.htm>.

### Doggy bag facts

Many restaurants offer their customers "doggy bags" for left over food not finished at the restaurant. There are potential health risks if the food is to be used for human consumption and not stored or handled appropriately by the consumer after leaving the restaurant. The Food Act 2003 does not prevent restaurants from providing doggy bags. Restaurants, however, may elect not to provide this service. It is the responsibility of the consumer to store and handle the food safely to minimise the risk of food poisoning. A fact sheet offering tips to consumers on safe storage and handling of doggy bags is available at <http://www.safefood.nsw.gov.au/pages/10.fact-sheets.htm>.



## Food safety activities

### NSWFA prosecutes three food businesses

The NSWFA successfully prosecuted three food businesses from February to April 2004. A Deniliquin individual was found guilty of operating an unlicensed meat processing business, fined \$3000 and ordered to pay additional expenses of \$1700. In a joint operation with National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Police Rural Crimes Unit, the NSWFA successfully prosecuted a Wee Waa individual who was found guilty of harvesting game without a licence and operating a game meat vehicle without a licence and ordered to pay a fine and court costs totalling \$1950. The NSWFA successfully prosecuted a Tamworth individual who was found guilty of storing 11 rabbits on a meat retail premises used for the sale of meat for human consumption but not licensed as an abattoir or game meat processing plant and fined \$500.

### NSWFA food safety activities for April

There were no food borne disease incidents due to system failure or mandatory product recalls recorded by the NSWFA for April 2004. The following statistics indicate food safety activity by the NSWFA for April 2004:

- 459 audits were conducted
- 115 scheduled inspections were conducted
- 52 unscheduled inspections were conducted
- 12 investigations of unlicensed businesses were conducted
- 11 investigations of other breaches were conducted
- 29 improvement notices were issued
- One prohibition order was issued
- One occasion of product seizure occurred
- Five show cause notices were issued
- Five warning letters were issued
- One licence was cancelled
- Four trade retrievals were conducted
- 33 shellfish harvest area closures occurred
- 64 shellfish harvest area openings occurred
- 12 microbiological samples were taken and one failed

### Recall: Pumpkin seed cake for undeclared peanuts

Mur Thai Food Co of Prestons, NSW conducted a voluntary consumer level recall on its Vinawang Pumpkin Seed Cake product imported from Vietnam packed in 100g cellophane packets with best before dates of 31/12/2005 (lot no. 031201 and 031001) and 12.2005 (lot no. 030710) distributed in Queensland (Gold Coast), New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory and South Australia due to it containing undeclared peanut protein. Consumers who suffer from a peanut protein allergy or intolerance should not consume this product.

### Recall: Soy carob products for undeclared milk protein

Naturally Good Products Pty Ltd of Thomas Town, Victoria conducted a voluntary consumer level recall on its Soy Carob Easter Bunny, Easter Eggs, Coconut Crunch cookies, Ginger Gem cookies and Honey Comb - Dairy Free products of various package descriptions and sizes with best before dates of 20 Oct 04 (Easter Bunny and Easter Eggs) or 01 Apr 05 distributed in Queensland, New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania due to products containing an undeclared allergen (milk protein). Consumers who suffer from a milk protein allergy or intolerance should not consume these products.

### Recall: *Salmonella* detected in tiger prawns

Fortune Enterprises of Mission Beach, Queensland conducted a voluntary recall on its cooked medium tiger prawns (sold loosely) product of various weights purchased between 26 March and 1 April 2004 distributed in Victoria and sold in the deli section of Safeway Stores in Victoria. The product was recalled as a precautionary health measure in response to testing which indicated the likely presence of *Salmonella*.



## International News

### US launches extensive mad cow test: researchers expect to find infected cattle

The US Department of Agriculture plans to test at least 220,000 cattle for mad cow disease as part of a \$70 million effort to find out if the infection is present in the United States and, if so, at what level. The one-time intensive program will be conducted nationwide over the next 12 to 18 months. Agriculture Department officials said they wouldn't be surprised to find a small number of cattle infected with bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) which was first detected in the US in December in a cow from Canada that was slaughtered in the state of Washington. Relying on rapid tests that give results in 24 hours or less, the new program will screen more than 10 times the number of animals tested in 2003 (reported in FSNet June 1/04).

### Handwashing program decreases incidence of diarrhoea among Pakistan's children

An intensive program of handwashing education and promotion in Pakistan decreased the incidence of diarrhoea by more than 50 per cent among children, according to a study in the June 2 issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association. With nearly two million children worldwide dying annually from diarrhoeal disease, previous studies have estimated that handwashing promotion interventions could prevent one million child deaths per year. Washing hands with soap prevents diarrhoea, but children at the highest risk of death are younger than one year, too young to wash their own hands. The study evaluated whether promotion of handwashing with soap among adult and children household members decreased diarrhoea among children at the highest risk of death from diarrhoea and found that children younger than 15 years living in households that were given handwashing education and plain soap had a 53% lower incidence of diarrhoea compared with children living in households that did not receive education or soap. Infants in households receiving education and soap recorded 39% fewer days with diarrhoea and severely malnourished children younger than five years in households that received education and soap recorded 42% fewer days with diarrhoea (reported in FSNet June 1/04 II).

### Asia Pacific nations seek to improve food safety

International health authorities have estimated that more than 700,000 people die each year in the Asia Pacific region due to contaminated food or water. Due to recent food and animal disease outbreaks in the region, the UN Food & Agricultural Organisation (FAO) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) held a four-day regional conference on food safety in Malaysia recently, involving representatives from 36 Asia Pacific nations. During the conference, public health issues as well as the potential disruption of regional trade due to poor food quality were addressed. Participants in the conference recognised the urged need for increased government enforcement of food safety rules and the need to overhaul food safety standards for the region. The conference concluded with several recommendations intended to improve food safety standards and practices in the region, including: periodic review and update of national food safety policies and legislation; use of international food safety standards of the Codex Alimentarius as a guide for new standards; establishing or strengthening national food borne disease surveillance programs; developing a consistent approach to food safety risk analysis; government promotion of food safety communication and education programs; and improved government enforcement of rules to ensure good practices are applied by producers and processors (reported in Silliker Microtech Information Update May 28 2004).

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