

Historic day for NSW Food Authority



Speakers at the NSW Food Authority stakeholder event were (l to r) Bob Whan (representing the Hon. John Kerin), Tony Downer (Australian Food and Grocery Council), Dr Heather Yeatman (consumer representative), Minister for Small Business the Hon David Campbell, George Davey of NSW Food Authority, Graham Peachey of Food Standards Australia New Zealand and Dr Andrew McKenzie of New Zealand Food Safety Authority.

It was a historic day for the NSW Food Authority as 160 guests gathered at its inaugural stakeholder event on 7 July 2004 at the Newington head office.

Consumer representatives, stakeholders from local, NSW and Commonwealth governments and representatives from the meat, seafood, dairy, egg, goat and plant products industries were well represented, along with retailer and manufacturer groups, hotel, restaurant and catering associations, public health, hospitals and childcare organisations and members of the food media. A report



NSW Food Authority Director-General opens the stakeholder event on July 7

detailing speaker presentations is available by contacting the

NSW Food Authority on 1300 552 406. A status report on NSW Food Authority activities in all industries, which was distributed at the event, is available from the Authority Internet site at www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au.

New food agency warns about counterfeit liquor

The NSW Food Authority issued a warning of liquor products seized in NSW that may contain potentially harmful levels of methanol in excess of legal standards and which are falsely described. The NSW Food Authority has seized counterfeit liquor products, some of which contain illegal levels of methanol and which use fake labels from nonexistent companies. In other cases, the liquor in question is an inferior and unsafe counterfeit of a legitimate product. Further information is available from the NSW Food Authority Internet site at www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au.

Budget gives teeth to new food regulation body

The NSW Food Authority received additional funding of almost \$2 million in the 2004/05 State Budget to improve the State's food regulation system and target compliance. Funding includes \$890,000 for the third phase of the NSW Shellfish Harvest Area Classification Project and \$1 million to help refine food safety programs in the hospitals, aged care, childcare and catering sectors as part of national requirements.

Food handling training in September

The NSW Food Authority and Restaurant and Catering NSW will conduct food handling training in September as part of Small Business Month. The short courses will cover food contamination and personal hygiene, prevention and control measures and government regulations. Cost is \$50 per person and courses will be held on 13 September from 9am to 12noon at Level 1, 80 Cooper St, Surry Hills and 20 September from 5pm to 8pm at 6 Avenue of the Americas, Newington. Book via Restaurant and Catering NSW on telephone 1300 650 646 or email stephenb@rcnsw.asn.au.

New food agency keeps track of oysters

The NSW Food Authority is keeping track of oysters through a new traceability project. Officers are visiting NSW's 60 oyster processors and large harvesters that process to check tracking systems and tracing oysters back from retailers and restaurants through labelling and invoicing. This project will check businesses are complying with the Food Standards Code and with the NSW Shellfish Program Operations Manual.



New food agency classifies sixth shellfish harvest area

The NSW Food Authority has classified the sixth NSW shellfish harvest area under the Australian Shellfish Quality Assurance Program. Twofold Bay at Eden has been conditionally approved for mussel production, joining Nelson Lake, Corrie Island and three areas in Wallis Lake which have already been approved. The classification process meets international standards, assists producers in developing export markets for NSW shellfish and assists local councils and authorities responsible for use of waterways and their environmental management. The NSW Food Authority will continue to monitor classified harvest areas to ensure classification remains relevant and appropriate. The Authority's *NSW Aquaculture Shellfish Harvest Area Water Bacteriology and Phytoplankton Survey Data January 2003 - December 2003* report is available at <http://www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/n-publications.htm>.

Help available on food business notification

The Food Standards Code requires that all food businesses in NSW notify the NSW Food Authority 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 failure to notify. NSW businesses can notify the Authority by Internet, which is fast, free and provides an instant Certificate of Confirmation; or paper notification, which incurs a charge of \$55. More information is available from the Authority Notification Help Desk on 1300 650 124 or visiting the Internet site 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>.

Foodborne illness complaints and investigations

Until the future role for local government in food regulation has been agreed, the NSW Food Authority is requesting that all foodborne illness complaints and investigations received by Councils, including single cases, are referred to the NSW Food Authority. A major responsibility of the Authority is to investigate complaints of foodborne illness and assist NSW Health in the investigation of food related outbreaks. The NSW Food Authority has implemented a system for logging and triaging complaints and enquiries, including cases of foodborne illness, from the public and other agencies. The Authority has a Consumer and Industry Contact Centre, reached by calling 1300 552 406, e-mailing contact@foodauthority.nsw.gov.au or faxing 02 9647 0026. After hours calls to these numbers will divert to the duty officer. The NSW Food Authority would appreciate it if all complaints of foodborne illness, including single cases, received by Councils could be forwarded to the Contact Centre via these numbers. This is so the Authority can monitor all foodborne illnesses cases, particularly those that cross jurisdictions, and develop a more consistent, uniform approach to investigation. Councils should not undertake investigations of cases of foodborne illness unless acting in conjunction with the NSW Food Authority. The Authority is happy to provide information and outcomes as appropriate.

NSW Food Authority food safety activities for May and June

The following statistics indicate food safety activity by the NSW Food Authority for May and June:

- 695 audits were conducted in May and 494 in June
- 491 scheduled inspections were conducted in May and 288 in June
- 108 unscheduled inspections were conducted in May and 298 in June
- 11 investigations of unlicensed businesses were conducted in May and seven in June
- Four investigations of other breaches were conducted in May and 11 in June
- There were 149 investigations of foodborne disease incidents in May and June, of which 67 were outbreaks (involving two or more people with the illness) and including eight significant foodborne illness investigations.
- 138 improvement notices were issued in May and 38 in June
- There were six occasions of product seizure in May and two occasions in June
- Four show cause notices were issued in May and one in June
- Ten warning letters were issued in May and 23 in June
- One successful prosecution was recorded
- The NSW Food Authority did not initiate any mandatory or voluntary product recalls in May or June
- Two trade retrievals were conducted in May and one in June
- 18 shellfish harvest area closures occurred in May and six in June
- 29 shellfish harvest area openings occurred in May and seven in June
- 40 microbiological samples were taken in May and 106 in June. There were no sample failures.



Japan asks qualifications of food handlers

Japanese food stores are introducing courses and qualifications for food handlers to ease consumer concerns over food quality and safety. Growing numbers of incidents involving unsafe products and false labelling have made consumers wary of food products. This has led Seiyu, a giant supermarket chain, to introduce a new marine product processing specialist qualification for about 1000 staff. Members must undergo a two week training course on how to use knives to slice fish and how to prepare sushi and sashimi. A similar fish specialist qualification has been in place since 1999 by Aeon, another nationwide chain. By the end of June, 2117 people had qualified (more from <http://www.washtimes.com/upi-breaking/20040726-022029-9849r.htm>)

Report calls for new food agency

An extensive review of the meat-processing industry has found Ontario, Canada needs a powerful new agency to enforce food safety, although, for the most part, meat produced in the province is safe to eat. Mr Justice Roland Haines, who conducted the review, recommended creating an independent food-safety division within the Ministry of Agriculture and Food that would have a strict approach to enforcement. Judge Haines said penalties should be increased and the agency should include investigators armed with guns in case of confrontations and with wide powers of arrest and investigation, backed by stiff penalties for those producing tainted meat. Additional powers should be given to inspectors, including "the ability to stop and inspect vehicles, to take samples, to conduct tests on meat and meat products and to have access to and to copy data from information systems." The report recommended establishing an information system to track complaints, compliance violations and enforcement problems and safe-handling labels placed on all meat products for sale in Ontario, not just poultry. Judge Haines also recommended increasing licensing fees for abattoirs, based on the volume of meat processed, developing a new fish inspection program and obliging every food business in Ontario to register with its local board of health (FSNet July 23/04).

Tomatoes blamed in Salmonella outbreak

USA health authorities linked Roma tomatoes to a salmonella outbreak that has sickened more than 300 people in five states at end July, but past experience has not found where in the food chain contamination occurs. Contaminated tomatoes were linked to outbreaks in 2002, 1993 and 1990. In the 1990 and 1993 outbreaks, tomatoes were traced back to a single tomato packer in South Carolina, where failure to monitor the levels of chlorine in which tomatoes were bathed was seized upon by investigators. Chlorine is essential to prevent contamination from bird droppings and organic debris and to prevent tomatoes passing on contamination. Tomatoes placed in water cooler than the tomato pulp will absorb water and salmonella organisms into the core tissues through the stem scar. In addition, salmonella can survive on the skin of tomatoes and multiply to high numbers on cut or sliced tomatoes held at room temperature (FSNet July 25/04)

Lead contamination of cornflour

The New Zealand Food Safety Authority (NZFSA) informed Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) on 26 July that they had found unusually high levels of lead in cornflour that had been imported from China and that 20 tonnes of this product was then re-exported to Australia. FSANZ immediately moved to liaise with state and territory authorities to investigate if this product had entered the food supply in Australia. As a result, a voluntary consumer level recall of Goodman Fielder's White Wings Cornflour occurred on 27 July (more from www.foodstandards.gov.au).

Health warning: Rising gastro epidemic

NSW Health has issued a warning on a rising gastroenteritis epidemic in the state. The disease has affected more than 6000 people in NSW in the first six months of this year, compared with a total of 3570 cases in all of 2003. More information is available from the NSW Food Authority Internet site at www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au.

NSW Health Alert - Salmonella

More than 1000 cases of salmonella infection have been reported in NSW in the first six months of the year, prompting NSW Health and the NSW Food Authority to issue a health alert to the community warning of the importance of properly preparing and cooking meat and chicken products. More information is available from the NSW Food Authority Internet site at www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au.



Recall: Breakfast cereal for foreign objects

Kellogg (Aust) Pty Ltd conducted a voluntary recall on Coco Pops and Rice Bubbles breakfast cereal packs in 450g, 785g, 1.065kg and 1.26kg (Coco Pops) packs and 300g, 530g and 850g (Rice Bubbles) packs and Kater-6-Pak 6 x 1kg plastic bags with date marks of Apr 05 28, 05 29 and 05 30 (consumer packs) and 28 01 05, 29 01 05 and 30 01 05 (food service catering packs) distributed nationally and in New Zealand after discovering small pieces of thin wire in packs.

Recall: Confectionery for undeclared egg

Lolliland Pty Ltd of Smeaton Grange, NSW conducted a voluntary recall on its Quanta Armada product packed in 225g multi-pack plastic with best before date 29 01 2005 distributed nationally and in New Zealand due to products containing an undeclared allergen (egg). Consumers with an egg allergy or intolerance should not consume this product.

Recall: Deli products for foreign object

Woolworths Limited conducted a voluntary recall on its semi dried tomato, marinated sun dried tomato, stuffed vine leaves, chargrilled siena antipasto, 97% fat free semi dried tomato and Italian style artichoke products packed in various sizes on or before 14 July 2004 distributed in Port Augusta, SA due to possible contamination with glass.

Recall: Confectionery for undeclared allergens

Confectionery Trading Company of Rydalmere, NSW conducted a voluntary recall on its IGA Fabulously Fun Lolly Pops packed in 200g propylene bags with best before date FEB2005 distributed in NSW and ACT due to some lolly pops containing undeclared egg and dairy protein. Consumers with an egg or dairy protein allergy or intolerance should not consume this product.

Recall: Mince for foreign object

Woolworths Limited conducted a voluntary recall on its Safeway brand regular beef mince packed in random weight polystyrene tray with clear plastic overwrap with use by date 02 07 04 (packed on 30 06 04) distributed in Safeway Croydon store, Victoria. Machinery failure may have resulted in metal filings being present in finished product.

Recall: Cake mix for undeclared allergens

All About Bread of Greenwood, WA conducted a voluntary recall on its Amaizing Cake Mix product packed in 500g propylene bags of all best before dates prior to 18/09/04 distributed in WA due to it containing undeclared egg and dairy protein. Consumers with an egg or dairy protein allergy or intolerance should not consume this product.

Recall: Pasta sauce for undeclared allergen

General Mills Australia of Mt Waverley, Victoria conducted a voluntary recall on its Latina Creamy Tomato and Roasted Mushroom Pasta Sauce product packed in 325g plastic tubs with use by date 09 07 04 distributed nationally after finding four tubs contained another variety of sauce with pine nuts, which are not declared on the packaging.

Recall: Pasta sauce for microbial growth

La Tosca Pty Ltd of Brunswick, Victoria conducted a voluntary recall on its La Tosca Sugudora Bolognese sauce with beef/meat product packed in 310g steel cans with batch codes starting with 02 or 03 distributed in Victoria, NSW, ACT and WA. Insufficient heat treatment during processing may result in microbial growth.

Recall: Infant formula for incorrect mix of formulation

Nestle Australia of Rhodes, NSW conducted a voluntary recall on its Nestle Nan 1 Probiotic Starter Infant Formula with Bifidus product packed in 900g cans with use by date 05 AUG 2005 lot code AUEUECT distributed nationally. Incorrect mix of formulation may have occurred during manufacturing process.

Food S@fety Bytes is a publication of the NSW Food Authority, Australia's first completely integrated food safety agency
 If you would like to make comments or suggestions, please telephone our Consumer and Industry Contact Centre on 1300 552 406
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