

## Local Government Partnership to Boost Food Safety



The Illawarra Regional Food Group conduct a recent partnership workshop at Wollongong City Council. Similar workshops were held all around NSW.

A new partnership model between the Food Authority and local government will further boost consumer food safety and enable authorities to respond more quickly to food emergencies and recalls. Local councils have made an important contribution to food safety in NSW for many years. Director-General George Davey said the new partnership would help consolidate an already strong relationship. "This is the result of nearly 18 months consultation with local government right across NSW," Mr Davey said. "The role of local councils will now be better defined so we can dismantle duplication and make sure resources are allocated where they need to go in the fight against unsafe and incorrectly labelled food. "I am pleased to say the Food Authority and councils already enjoy a strong working relationship that will now be even stronger. Greater coordination also means we can respond even faster to food emergencies and recalls." The Local Government and Shires Associations welcomed the new partnership. "It's no secret that councils often have much better "on the ground" knowledge about local problems and our new partnership gives councils training and support to help regulate retail and food service businesses in their local area," Mr Davey said. The new partnership - the product of many months of close consultation with councils across NSW - was based on an agreed model that ensures all 152 councils in NSW undertake a food regulatory role according to their capacity and resources." Mr Davey said a Food Regulation Partnership Steering Committee had met regularly to set the framework for the new model. The Committee comprises representatives of the NSW Department of Local Government; NSW Local Government and Shires Associations, Local Government Managers Australia - NSW Division, NSW Food Authority, NSW Health, Australian Institute of Environmental Health - NSW Division and the Development and Environmental Professionals Association. Mr Davey said a 12 month implementation plan was underway, while the new partnership model was due to start in July 2007. A three month pilot of the model has commenced with 11 councils across NSW. Work has also started on developing the administration and coordination framework, which will boost support and assistance programs as well as I.T. infrastructure.

## "Zero Tolerance" Approach to Incorrectly Labelled Seafood



Large operation uncovers widespread breaches of Food Act

The State Government has adopted a "zero tolerance" approach to incorrectly labelled seafood after a major three-month joint operation. Officers from the NSW Food Authority and Department of Primary Industries (DPI) checked 293 restaurants, seafood retailers, wholesalers, processors and commercial fishers between Tweed Heads and Eden between February and May for breaches of the Food Act and black-market fishing. Primary Industries Minister Ian Macdonald said there were 255 offences under the Food Act.

The Food Authority took evidence for three potential prosecutions for substitution and labelling offences. Evidence was also taken for 39 penalty notices while 213 warning letters were issued for substitution, labelling, temperature control and hygiene offences.

"This is not good enough. The Government's approach to this is zero tolerance, we have a duty to protect the community from these dodgy practices," Mr Macdonald said.

"The public has a right to know exactly what it is paying for. The joint operation may be over, but compliance officers will be out over coming months - especially in the lead-up to Christmas."





## OUTCOMES/PROJECTS

### Consumer Focus

Over the past few months the Food Authority has actively canvassed opinions from a range of stakeholders in a bid to better understand how the agency is perceived. This was part of a strategic project within the Authority's overall strategic plan. The opinion of consumers, industry sectors as well as a broad cross section of Authority staff was gathered. As a new agency that only recently celebrated its second anniversary, this was the first time the Authority had actively sought external opinions on its public profile. Separately, a staff workshop was held in June that was attended by Executive and 20 staff representing a broad cross-section of the Authority's activities. The workshop, which also considered the results of the consumer and industry surveys, agreed the Authority should become more consumer focussed in its external profile. It is important to note this will not impact on the Authority's core business of working with industry and local government to ensure consumers continue to get safe and correctly labelled food. While food safety remains the Authority's number one priority, it was felt all the agency's activities lead to one ultimate beneficiary - NSW consumers. To help reposition to a more external consumer focus, a draft Strategic Communications Plan has been prepared mapping out the next three years. This is a road-map showing how the Authority plans to engage with consumers and provide them with the best available advice and information on food safety. The Authority's ultimate aim is to be most trusted source of food safety information in NSW.

### Revamped Web Site

As a result of the Authority's new focus, work is underway on an extensive top-down redesign and overhaul of the Authority's web site to make it more consumer "friendly". The new Strategic Communications Plan recognises the importance of the web site as one of the major tools to reach out to consumers. While still in the design planning stage, it is envisaged the new site will incorporate new and updated sections as well as an interactive tour of the Authority's lab. A new consumer section will provide visitors with a range of dynamic and constantly updated information about food safety. While the Authority has recognised the importance of consumers, the new web site will continue to cater to the Authority's other important stakeholders across industry, federal, state and local government. It is hoped the new site will be up and running by early 2007.

### Food Borne Illness Snapshot

The Foodborne Illness Unit experienced its busiest month in May with 123 reported cases of alleged food poisoning. Seventy three were single

case reports and 50 outbreaks. On face value these figures suggest an increase in foodborne illness, however early alerts from NSW Health indicated there was also a rapid and significant rise in community acquired viral gastroenteritis during this time. As a result, the FBI team was careful to assess whether an illness was more likely the result of a viral person-to-person illness than a food issue. The team was able to instead focus on suspected food related cases. The importance of inter-agency communications was also highlighted when the Authority was informed by NSW Health of a case of *listeriosis* in a nursing home resident. An investigation examined the nursing home kitchen and its supplier of cooked, sliced vacuum packed meat products. Food samples were taken for analysis and *Listeria* was found in meat products supplied to the nursing home. This led to a prohibition order preventing the supplier from using its slicing machine and cryovacing of ready-to-eat meats.

### Unsafe Meat Seized and Destroyed



Food Authority officer Peter Commins (pictured above) with a consignment of meat seized from a premises at Bexley. The owner was found to be processing meat in unclean conditions and without a license. A total of 400 kilograms of meat was taken to a rendering plant where it was made into fertilizer. The proprietor was fined \$660 for both offences

### Case Study - Glass in Jam



The Compliance & Inspection Unit recently received a consumer complaint about a large piece of glass inside a jar of apricot jam. The glass fragment appeared to be the same type of glass as the jar and most likely came from the production line. Investigations confirmed the product was imported from Poland. The Authority is currently working with the food business to identify the likely source and what needs to be done to make sure it doesn't happen again!

### 2007 Food Safety Expo

Planning is well underway for a major food safety conference being staged in 2007 by the NSW Food Authority in conjunction with FSANZ. The theme of the conference will be "future directions

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## INTERNATIONAL / NATIONAL

in relation to food". As well as highlighting emerging trends in Australia and internationally, the conference will amass a broad sweep of perspectives across the community - focusing on the consumer and industry. It will discuss the challenges these future scenarios pose for food standards and the practical issues that need to be considered. The conference, to take place between September 19-21 at the Sydney Exhibition and Convention Centre, will be of interest to consumers as well as industry and regulators. There will be an exciting line-up of speakers! Stay tuned for further conference updates in future editions of *Food Chain*.

### Implementation Sub Committee



Dr Anne Astin, CEO Dairy Food Safety Victoria with George Davey and Peter Sutherland.

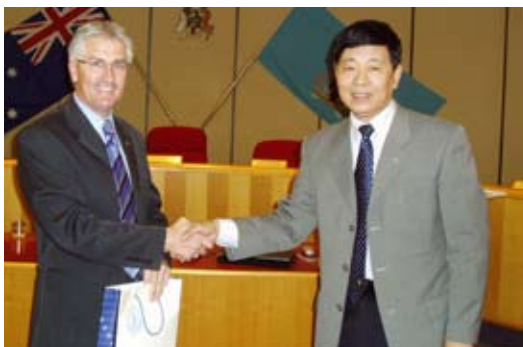


ISC meeting at Food Authority head office.

The Authority hosted the 11th meeting of the Implementation Sub Committee (ISC) at its head office in Newington during June. ISC includes representatives of all food regulators from Australia and New Zealand. ISC develops guidelines on food regulations and standards implementation and enforcement activities. This is aimed at achieving a consistent approach to the way regulations and standards are interpreted and enforced across jurisdictions, regardless of whether food is sourced from domestic producers, export-registered establishments or from imports. In conjunction with ISC 11, the Authority co-hosted (with the New Zealand Food Safety Authority) a workshop on local government roles in food regulation. ISC recognises the important role local councils play in food regulation and that collaboration between jurisdictions and councils

is key to the consistent implementation of food regulations and standards. Both jurisdictions and local government representatives participated in the workshop.

### Olympic Food Safety



Director Food Safety Programs Peter Sutherland with Zhu Xiaowan, Director of Beijing Municipal Health Bureau's Policies and Legislation Division.

The NSW Food Authority recently delivered a presentation to members of the Beijing Municipal Health Bureau about food safety plans during the Sydney 2000 Olympics. There was not one reported case of food-borne illness during the two week Sydney games. The Beijing delegation was also interested in government regulation and inspections of food in public venues. The Bureau is responsible for food safety during the 2008 Beijing Olympics and is using the 2000 Sydney Games as a best practice model.

### UK Dairy Visitor



Peter Sutherland with Jim Begg, Director General of Dairy UK and current President of the International Dairy Federation.

The Director General of Dairy UK and President of the International Dairy Federation Jim Begg recently visited Australia where he delivered presentations to the NSW and Queensland branches of the Dairy Industry Association. Jim discussed what's happening in the global dairy sector and provided an international perspective on the future of the Australian industry.

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## STAFF

### SFA Football Update



SFA brick wall about to stomp an opponent into the astro-turf.



SFA all stars show a quick turn of speed.



Mafi Mataafa clears the way for Craig Shadbolt (with ball).

After a promising start the Sweet FA's were unlucky not to make the finals. The team came 12th overall out of 16. Nevertheless, it was a valiant effort overall from all involved. The matches were all well attended and acted as a platform for social interaction both outside and inside the office. Our new sport is indoor soccer and we are fielding two teams (Sweet FC's and the Fooder-Roos). Soccer generates considerable interest and the teams should have their pick from more than 20 players.

### Authority to Conduct Hong Kong Communications Workshops

The Food Authority recently won a competitive tender to provide the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department of Hong Kong with

comprehensive training on Risk Communication. The training will focus on a mix of theory and practical case studies on communicating food safety risks. The workshops aim to give Hong Kong officials the skills to effectively communicate with the media and general public. The Communications team are developing a course with technical input from Craig Shadbolt, Peter Sutherland and Lisa Szabo. Catrin May and Adrian Bradley will head off to Hong Kong in November to run the week of workshops and introduce a training kit on risk perceptions developed specifically for the Hong Kong Department.

### New Faces at the Authority



Verica Josevska - The first voice many people hear when they call the Authority



Mafi Mataafa from Policy & Science



Alan Edwards and Christine Turney in Enforcement.

Welcome to a number of new faces at the Authority - Alexia Lucas - Shellfish Division; Esther Wijeratne - Finance; Elizabeth Csanitz - Operations; Steven Fagan - Records; Mafi Mataafa - Policy & Science; Elli Lamplugh - reception; Peter Steven - Finance; Verica Josevska - Reception; Alan Edwards - Enforcement; Glen Batchelor - Human Resources; Helen Vermulen - Taree and Thida Win. In other moves Chris Chan, Principal Science Officer, has left the Authority on two years' long service leave. Edward Jansson has been appointed acting Principal Science Officer.

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