

Introduction from the D-G



As the NSW Food Authority completes its second year of operation, we can look back with satisfaction on what we have achieved over the past 12 months. The Authority has worked to ensure NSW consumers continue to get access to safe food. Over the year, we have gained an international profile as Australia's first through-chain food agency and the number of invitations to participate in international forums is recognition of our excellent track record. *Year in Review 2005/06* documents some of those highlights from our second year.



To ensure that food in NSW is safe and correctly labelled and that NSW consumers are able to make informed choices about the food they eat

Minister launches industry newsletter – *Foodwise*



The Minister for Primary Industries, the Hon. Ian Macdonald, launching *Foodwise*, the new industry newsletter for Food Authority licensees on 12 December 2005 at the Stakeholder Evening (refer to story on page 3).

Public advised to limit eating Sydney Harbour seafood



Sydney Harbour, looking from Circular Quay across to Clifton Gardens.

All commercial fishing in Sydney Harbour ceased in January 2006 after the NSW Food Authority detected elevated levels of dioxins in some fish and seafood. An Expert Science Panel of leading toxicologists, chaired by Professor Brian Priestly, advised the Authority on the issue. The Panel recommended that people should limit eating seafood caught in Sydney Harbour, including Parramatta River.

The Minister for Primary Industries, Ian Macdonald, announced the closure of Sydney Harbour to commercial fishing after the Food Authority advised him of the Panel's recommendations. Sydney Harbour remains closed to commercial fishing indefinitely, while recreational fishers have been advised to eat no more than one 150 gram serving of fish caught in Sydney Harbour each month.

Public relations award for top campaign

The Authority was awarded a prestigious Public Relations Institute of Australia National Golden Target Award for 'outstanding approach, execution and outcome' in Brisbane on 24 October 2005. The Authority took first place in the Community Communications category for its campaign to dispel the myths about mercury levels in fish.



Samara Kitchener (right), Executive Director Consumer and Corporate Services, accepting the Golden Target Award for the Food Authority.

The public consumer campaign about safe levels of fish consumption during pregnancy was launched in May 2005. (Mercury-in-fish launch photos on page 4.) Pregnant and breastfeeding women, and women who are planning to get pregnant, may wish to limit their intake of some species known to have higher levels of mercury, which may affect the development of the central nervous system in unborn babies and young children.

The Food Authority produced 500,000 wallet cards,



NSW Food Authority
6 Avenue of the Americas, Newington
Tel 1300 552 406
Fax 02 9647 0026
contact@foodauthority.nsw.gov.au
www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au



which contained scientific advice on how to safely include fish as part of a balanced diet. The cards were distributed by doctors, midwives, dieticians, fish outlets, NSW Health and other community groups, demonstrating that government can work effectively with industry, consumer groups and medical groups to promote a health message.

Following the success of the campaign, the World Health Organisation (WHO) invited the Authority to participate in a workshop in Geneva. At the January 2006 workshop, Samara Kitchener, Executive Director Corporate and Consumer Services, presented a communication solution for other countries to show people how to safely eat fish while reducing the risk from mercury.

Protecting NSW consumers

The Food Authority's first priority is to make sure the food reaching NSW consumers is safe and healthy.

Following a Food Authority campaign, the number of butchers selling substitute meat plummeted from 70 percent in 2004 to less than one percent in 2005. The NSW meat industry supported the Authority's efforts to reduce meat substitution and illegal use of preservatives.



NSW Food Authority auditor checks meat for sulphur dioxide at a retail butchery.

Recall of Mars bars

In July 2004, an extortion threat against Masterfoods resulted in the company removing Mars and Snickers bars from sale. The Authority alerted retailers to remove the bars from the shelf in order to protect public health. Following the extortion threat, the Authority reviewed its policy on intentional interference of food.

Safer doner kebabs



The Authority launched an education campaign, targeting a popular fast food, the doner kebab. As a result, food handling and hygiene practices improved among kebab outlets.

Helping Beijing Olympic organisers

Director-General George Davey was invited to the Beijing Olympics Expert Board on Food Safety to advise Beijing Olympic organisers on how to reduce food-borne illness in 2008. Chinese officials are keen to repeat the success of the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games, when there were no reported cases of food-borne illness. The Board advises the Beijing Organising Committee of the Olympic Games on how to deliver food safety during the Games.



George Davey, Director-General, addressing the Beijing Olympics Expert Board on Food Safety in June 2005.

Helping Asian countries manage emerging food risks

Executive Director Corporate and Consumer Services, Samara Kitchener, conducted a workshop in Guangzhou on how risk communication is essential in reducing panic during a food-related crisis, such as a bird flu outbreak. The December workshop was part of a wider World Health Organization (WHO) project on developing a food safety framework for China, in collaboration with the State Food and Drug Administration.

In January 2006, Authority Consumer Education Manager Catrin May conducted a similar workshop in South Korea.



Catrin May presenting in Seoul.

Australian team to Roquefort led by Authority staff member

The Authority's Edwina Mulhearn led an audit team from FSANZ and AQIS to France in April 2005 to examine sheep milk farms, cheese making facilities, caves for cheese maturation, and cheese packaging plants in the Aveyron Region. The French Government had applied to allow Roquefort cheese to be exported to Australia after a ten-year absence. The audit team assessed the level of control over hazards. Roquefort cheese is now available to Australian consumers.

Working with industry

The Authority is always looking at ways to improve our communication with industry stakeholders. The industry consultative committees offer ongoing opportunities for two-way communication. In addition, a new communication tool, the industry newsletter, *Foodwise*, will ensure the food industry regularly gets all the regulatory news and information it needs.



Industry representatives and Authority staff at the end-of-year Stakeholder Evening, which provided an opportunity to network and discuss issues relating to food safety with the food industry.

New Plant Products Food Safety Scheme introduced

In May 2005, a new Plant Products Food Safety Scheme came into effect, covering fresh-cut fruit (usually consumed raw); fresh-cut vegetables (usually consumed raw); vegetables-in-oil; unpasteurised juice and seed sprouts. The Scheme applies to businesses involved in their production, storage and transport.

New industry committees

The Dairy Industry Conference was reconstituted, under the Dairy Industry Conference Regulation 2005, and its inaugural meeting was on 20 February 2006. In anticipation of the new Egg Products Food Safety Scheme to be introduced later in 2006, the new Poultry and Eggs Industries Committee had its inaugural meeting on 27 March 2006.

Meetings with NSW fishers

At a series of meetings with NSW fishers, the Authority and the NSW Seafood Industry Conference received feedback about a number of key concerns for the seafood industry.



North Coast fishers meeting September 2005.

AIFST Award recognising D-G's contribution

In July 2005, Director-General George Davey was awarded the 2005 Australian Institute of Food Science and Technology (AIFST) Award of Merit for his outstanding contribution to the food sector, spanning more than 30 years, in particular, his 'longstanding and valued contributions to the Institute and his advancement of food safety, regulation, policy and food standards within Australia'. The award recognises significant achievement within food science and technology across research, industry and education.



Director-General George Davey receiving the AIFST Award of Merit from AIFST President, Professor Paul Baumgartner.

Authority Staff Conference and 2005 Staff Awards

On 11 and 12 November 2005, Food Authority staff from head office and branches gathered at the Penrith Panthers for the first Food Authority Staff Conference. The Minister for Primary Industries, the Hon. Ian Macdonald, presented the 2005 staff awards. Award recipients were: Jenine Ryle, Kerry Stephen, David Hook, Grahame Moran, Barry Wallace, Deborah Brookfield, Karen Krist, Marianne Tegal, Brett Campbell, Phillip Bird and



Peter Day. The staff conference is likely to be an annual event.

The Minister presenting Jenine Ryle with her staff award.

New 3-year Strategic Plan

On 3 April 2006, Director-General George Davey announced a new 3-Year Strategic Plan for the Authority which establishes the future directions and identifies key priority areas of work. Through specific strategic projects, the Authority will be enhancing how it undertakes its work.



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Mercury-in-fish launch



Top: mercury-in-fish poster on display at the Sydney Fish Markets for the launch on 11 May 2005.

Bottom: nutritionist Tania Nash, Director-General George Davey, AMA (NSW) President Dr John Gullotta and Minister Macdonald.

Working with local government

Local government has had a role in food regulation in NSW for more than 100 years, conducting inspections of local food businesses although not undertaking regulatory work. During 2005, the Authority and local government formed a 'Food Regulation Partnership', which completed a model to define and mandate the role of local government in food regulation.

International visits to Authority

A delegation headed by Hong Kong's Secretary of Health, Welfare and Food, Dr York Chow, visited the Authority, on 16 September 2005, to view how the Authority regulates food safety across NSW. The trip was important as the Hong Kong Government is considering establishing a single food agency to oversee food regulation.

A key member of the Chinese Government's Australian mission visited the Food Authority in October 2005. Mr Liu Zhiming, Counsel (Science & Technology) Consulate General for the People's Republic of China in Sydney, met Director-General George Davey to discuss the scope of the Food Authority's work in regulating food safety.



Executive Director Corporate & Consumer Services Samara Kitchener, with Mr Liu Zhiming, Consul (Science and Technology), Consulate General for the People's Republic of China in Sydney, Director-General George Davey and Eric Winton, NSW Department of State and Regional Development, Sydney-Beijing Olympic Secretariat.

Aged care and hospital roadshows roll out

The Authority presented a series of 'information roadshows' to staff from hospital and aged care facilities on important details about the new Vulnerable Populations Food Safety Scheme, which will be released in late 2006. Patients and residents in hospitals and aged care facilities are considered to be more vulnerable to food poisoning. The presentations highlighted how the new scheme will affect hospitals and aged care facilities, and how to introduce food safety programs. A total of 20 roadshows ran from September to November and covered regional and metropolitan NSW, including Sydney, Wollongong, Newcastle, Port Macquarie, Coffs Harbour, Ballina, Orange, Dubbo, Wagga Wagga and Batemans Bay.



Participants at the Wagga Wagga roadshow. The roadshows were popular, attracting around 1200 participants across NSW.

Authority presence at microbiology conferences

Eleven Authority staff submitted papers and presentations at the 12th Australian Food Microbiology



George Davey, Director-General and Peter Sutherland, Director Food Safety Programs with Dr Fumiko Kasuga, National Institute of Health Sciences, Japan

Conference and 2nd International Conference on Microbial Risk Assessment: Foodborne Hazards, held in Sydney in February 2006.

