

## Food Authority Suspends Prawning on Sydney Harbour



The State Government has temporarily suspended prawning operations in Sydney Harbour after tests revealed elevated dioxin levels in Harbour prawns. The closure, which affects commercial and recreational prawn fishers only, was introduced by the NSW Food Authority on December 3, and will remain in force until further test results are available. NSW Minister for Primary Industries, Ian Macdonald, said the temporary closure was put in place as a precautionary measure. Elevated dioxin levels can pose a potential health risk over the long-term and have been linked to serious health issues such as cancer. "This closure applies to Sydney Harbour prawn operators only," Mr Macdonald said.

"Fin-fishing in Sydney Harbour (outside already existing restrictions) is not affected, as there is no evidence of elevated dioxin levels in fin-fish at this stage.

"The NSW Food Authority will work with the NSW Department of Primary Industries and NSW Department of Environment and Conservation to conduct

further tests as a priority. The testing will provide a more comprehensive picture of current dioxin levels.

"A range of fin-fish species will also be included in sampling as an added precaution. The NSW Food Authority will then advise the Government of any further actions that need to be taken once the results are available.

"We are hopeful to have the results before Christmas so that we can provide certainty to fishers in the Sydney Harbour."

Mr Macdonald said the closure was based on advice of the NSW Food Authority, which consulted with the NSW Department of Primary Industries, the NSW Department of Environment and Conservation and NSW Health.

There are 20 commercial fishers who harvest prawns from Sydney Harbour. The Sydney Harbour prawn fishery is quite small, with only 5.5 tonnes of prawns harvested in 2004/2005, or less than 1% of the traditional supply to local seafood markets.

Sydney Harbour prawns are generally supplied to particular markets and this temporary closure is not expected to impact the broader availability of locally grown prawns from NSW.

## Simulated Bird Flu Exercise - Eluesis 2005



The State Emergency Operations Centre command room. Food Authority staff joined dozens of staff from other Federal and State agencies in the mock bird flu exercise.



Food Authority Policy & Project Officer Kelly Collins and Patrick Maywood from NSW Health prepare a response to a scenario during Eluesis.

The Food Authority was actively involved in Exercise Eluesis 2005, which tested the ability of Federal and State agencies to contain a simulated outbreak of avian flu across three states. The Authority established an emergency situation room at its Newington head office, while staff representing Operations, Science & Policy and Communications worked with Federal and State agencies on strategies to contain the spread of the virus. The three day exercise attempted to simulated as realistically as possible a range of scenarios authorities would have to deal with in the event of a real crisis. Director-General George Davey said Exercise Eluesis had been invaluable in preparing the Authority to respond to a real outbreak. "While we all hope we won't experience a real avian flu crisis, Eluesis has show us a number of valuable lessons to help manage any future outbreak," he said.





## OUTCOMES/PROJECTS

### Food Safety Initiative

The NSW Government and Food Authority have launched an initiative to improve food safety for small to medium business. The Minister for Primary Industries, Ian Macdonald, and Minister for Small Business, David Campbell, called for industry feedback on a discussion paper detailing options for improving food safety in NSW.

**"Improving Food Safety Performance in NSW - an SME Perspective"** outlines a number of options for enhancing the regulatory regime for food safety. Mr Macdonald said these options included establishing a Small Business Working Group to liaise with the Food Authority and SME's, better integration of inspection and audit activities, mandatory, standardised food handling training, the promotion of best practice and truth in labelling for imported products. **"Improving Food Safety Performance in NSW - an SME Perspective"** is the result of a NSW Government Food Safety Roundtable convened in May 2005.

"I urge all participants in the food production, processing and related industries to respond to the discussion paper and help ensure one of NSW's major industries maintains world-class safety standards," Mr Macdonald said.

The discussion paper can be downloaded from the Food Authority's web site at [www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au](http://www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au) The closing date for comments and submissions is 10 February, 2006.

### Strategic Issues Management



With so many food safety issues appearing on the agenda, ranging from the risk of bird flu to dioxins, we thought it timely to profile the Authority's Strategic Issues Management (SIM) process. Meeting 9:15AM every Monday, SIM comprises representatives from various Authority functions, including Operations, Science & Policy, Enforcement and Communications. SIM is involved in scanning and assessing potential issues that could impact on food safety/regulation in NSW. This might include the obvious example of a potential pathogen outbreak, or something more prosaic like a new standard from FSANZ. Either way, SIM examines these issues and decides what action needs to be taken to ensure the Authority remains on top of any new or emerging food issue.

Importantly, SIM also reports directly to the Director-General and Executive so they are kept informed of breaking food issues. An example was the recent Masterfoods' Mars and Snickers bar recall. SIM members liaised with NSW Police and other agencies as the extortion threat developed. The various members of SIM also contributed expertise from their respective areas to the larger group in meetings with the Director-General and Executive. This meant all responsible areas of the Food Authority were able to respond in a coordinated and timely manner. But SIM isn't only active during crisis, it also:

- Identifies proactive and reactive issues and key messages for the Authority's briefings, communications and advice;
- Reviews issues that the Minister's office have been notified about and reports on their current status;
- Sets key issues management tasks for branches over the week ahead;
- Provides a single point of contact between the Authority and the Minister's policy staff; and,
- Provides direct support and briefings to the Director General, ensuring his comprehensive knowledge of all current issues.

As a result of comments raised during the 2005 Staff Conference, SIM is examining how best to keep Authority staff briefed of its on-going activities.

### Food-Borne Illness Snapshot



The Food Authority's FBI team investigated 81 food poisoning cases in October, compared to 79 in September. Cases investigated included a *Salmonella* Typhimurium PT 170 in a cafe that was linked to chicken. The FBI team worked closely with the NSW Health Communicable Disease Branch (CBD) and South West Area Health unit to isolate the problem. The team issued a verbal warning. The team also investigated a kiosk after *Campylobacter* was found in a seafood salad with egg and mayonnaise. In other news, members of the FBI team met with representatives of the NSW Community Relations Commission and Lebanese community to discuss the food safety issue around consumption of raw meat (and raw lambs liver). The Food Authority recognises that eating raw liver is an important cultural tradition among some sections of the NSW Lebanese community and has produced a fact sheet in Arabic outlining how to reduce the risk associated with eating raw liver/meat. Representatives from the Lebanese community agreed to distribute fact sheets at their local community meetings and through the State's multi-cultural media.

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## INTERNATIONAL / NATIONAL



John Castles AM, Chair Standards Australia; Peggy Douglass Senior Food Technologist, Food Branch AQIS; George Davey and Philippa Seagrave General Manager Community, Materials and IT Standards, Standards Australia.

Standards Australia presented an award for excellence to committee FT-024-001 Food Safety for international achievement in standards development. The award was received by Peggy Douglass Senior Food Technologist, Food Branch, AQIS, together with committee chairman, George Davey, Director General, Food Authority.

### Overseas Delegations



Executive Director Corporate Services (third from left) and Peter Sutherland (fifth from left) and members of the University of Qingdao delegation.

Members of Ocean University of China, located in Qingdao, visited the Authority in November to discuss food safety during large public events. Qingdao will host a number of events during the 2008 Olympic Games, and delegation members were keen to learn from Sydney's success in hosting the 2000 Olympics, when no cases of food-poisoning were reported.



Members of a delegation from Shanxi province in China, who visited the Food Authority in November to examine food safety regulation, with particular focus on audit & verification and enforcement.

### Media Round Up



NOVA FM's Merrick with Peter Sutherland and Rosso

The Food Authority and food safety continued to get strong coverage in the media over the past month. As part of **National Food Safety Week** in November, the Authority's Director of Food Safety Programs Peter Sutherland inspected the NOVA FM kitchen for pathogens. Peter went on air twice with popular personalities Merrick & Rosso to report on his findings. As expected the kitchen was, in the words of Merrick, "fairly gross". Peter explained that many work-place kitchens would be in a similar state of grubbiness and general uncleanliness. Peter used the opportunity to reinforce basic food safety principles. On a serious note, the segments were a great opportunity to spread the food safety message to the "Gen-Y" demographic. Nearly as entertaining as Merrick & Rosso was the Food Authority's quirky "pork chops that glow" media release. This was in response to a caller to talk back radio who was understandably alarmed to see his pork chops glowing in the bottom of his fridge. The Food Authority issued a release reassuring consumers that the likely culprit, *Pseudomonas fluorescens*, was harmless. Glowing food is usually a sure sign food is beginning to spoil and should be discarded. The story was widely reported by radio, television and print throughout the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, New Zealand and even South Africa.



George Davey presents David Yard, Head of the UK Food Standards Authority's Food Incident Branch, with a Food Authority tie. David met Authority staff and discussed how recent UK food crisis were handled, notably food dye Sudan I - IV.

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## INTERNATIONAL / NATIONAL



Presentation of the 2005 NSW Food Authority Dairy Science Award to Dr Peter Doyle. Left to right: Gregory Lindsay-Owen, President of the Dairy Research Foundation (DRF), with Dr Doyle award recipient, George Davey, and Professor Bill Fulkerson, DRF Director.

Food Authority Director-General George Davey recently presented the 2005 NSW Food Authority Dairy Science Award to Dr Peter Doyle. The award, which recognises excellence in dairy research, paid tribute to Dr Doyle's long and distinguished career in the field. Dr Doyle's chosen field of work in his early career was ruminant nutrition, focusing primarily on sheep. His PhD studies at the University of Western Australia were on 'Sulphur nutrition in sheep on wool growth'. Dr Doyle went on to important areas of research included designer milk and grazing management. Dr Doyle has also been a key figure in the **Australia Society of Animal Production** where he was Deputy President until recently. George said Dr Doyle commanded enormous respect and loyalty from his team.

"Peter tirelessly strives for quality research and stresses the need to get research results back to the industry," George said.

### Visiting UK Dairy Expert



Members of the NSW Dairy Industry Conference with UK dairy expert Michael Lambert and George Davey

Visiting UK dairy expert Michael Lambert held discussions with members of the NSW Dairy Industry Conference at the NSW Food Authority in November. Michael is a prominent dairy farmer from Somerset, UK, and formerly held the positions of Chair of the UK National Farmers Union (NFU) - Milk Committee and Treasurer of the NFU. He is currently Chair of COPA-COGECA - Milk and Dairy Products Committee. COPA-COGECA represents national farmer organisations in the UK and Europe. He also represents the UK dairy industry on the International Dairy Federation (IDF) and IFAP. Michael gave the NSW Conference a presentation on "Market Developments

and the Future Prospects of the EU Dairy Policy" as well as providing an up-date on the UK dairy industry and adjustments since deregulation. He also discussed changes and trends in dairy supply chain margins in the UK industry.

### Authority Staff



Ray Day with the jewfish (also called mulloway) he recently caught off rocks at Lennox Head. Ray informs us he was using a rod and reel with a "Storm" soft plastic lure. The fish weighed 32 lb cleaned, and a week later Ray caught another three ranging from 28lb to 18lb. Ray reports that "everyone in my immediate neighbourhood ate jewfish that week."

### Speedy Recovery - Paul Crick

Paul Crick had a lucky escape after the utility he was travelling in rolled down a 30 metre embankment. He was hospitalised with injuries to his ankle, knee and severe bruising. He has been discharged, and has thanked everyone at the Food Authority who sent him best wishes for a quick recovery. Paul's brother-in-law was also seriously injured, and we wish him a speedy recovery.

### Baby Boom Continues! Congratulations - Samara Kitchener and Phillip Svoronos!

It's been a bumper year for Food Authority babies - first Miranda van der Pol, then Ian Lambert, and now Phillip Svoronos! Phillip's son, Andrew, was born on November 1, reportedly with more hair than his father! And after weeks of denying the undeniable, Samara announced what everyone knew anyway. Samara is due to give birth to a little Kitchener in June 2006. Congratulations to all!

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## Authority Staff



**H**eidi Pullen, (above) has been newly appointed Licensing Clerk in the Taree Office. Heidi started work with the NSW Food Authority in November, 2005 after returning from a two week holiday in Vietnam. Heidi previously worked as a legal secretary for six years and spent two years working and travelling overseas. Her many interests include travelling, jewellery-making and soccer and swimming. Heidi excels in rowing, having achieved a string of first places at state, CHS and Pacific Age level. She was also chosen to represent NSW in New Zealand while at school. Most recently, Heidi attained a First and Second place at the NSW Masters Regatta in Penrith in May 2005 in the double and single skull events.



**R**od McCarthy and family (Alice, Michael and Erica) recently took a trip to Thailand, where they visited Safari World, Bangkok. While there they hung out with giant snakes, elephants and a few docile tigers. The type of things most families do while on holiday! Here Rod poses with a tiger at the Tiger Temple near Kanchanabur. *led - sure Rod didn't mock this up in Photoshop?*

## 2005 Staff Conference



**F**eed back from a wide section of staff indicates the 2005 Staff Conference was a roaring success! The two-day conference brought together staff from head office and Branches, enabling different Branches to showcase their work. Several Branches produced videos to better illustrate their work. And while the first day resembled a mini-Tropfest Short Film Festival, presentations were humorous and all were well received. The conference also included team building exercises, and an early morning breakfast on the banks of the Penrith River. The Minister for Primary Industries, Ian Macdonald, attended the staff dinner and presented this year's staff awards. Recipients of this year's awards were: **Peter Day; Jenine Ryle; Kerry Stephen; David Hook; Grahame Moran; Barry Wallace; Deborah Brookfield; Karen Krist; Marianne Tegal; Brett Campbell; Phillip Bird and Peter Day.** The conference was adjudged such a success that annual staff conferences will likely become a permanent fixture. The following pages feature images taken during our 2005 Staff Conference



Jenine Ryle with Minister Macdonald



Kerry Stephen and Minister Macdonald

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## STAFF CONFERENCE



Bill Porter in a silly hat - (ed, obviously thinks he's still on a beach in England).



Blue team look like they mean business...



Jane Verwoerd; Barbara Cross and Phillip Bird at breakfast by the river



Miranda van der Pol with a brightly coloured frisbee thing...



Ed Kraa; Ian Beer; Terry Outtrim and Christine Turney



Red team look menacing...



Award winners with George and the Minister



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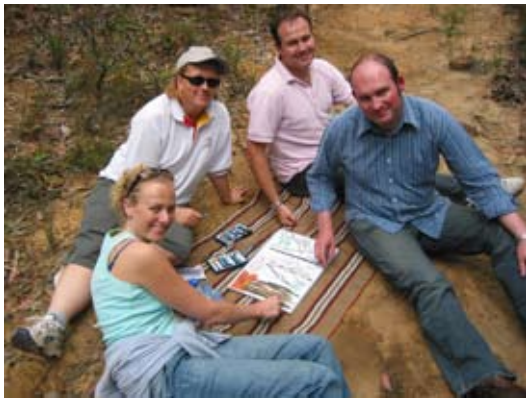
## Staff Christmas Party



Catrin May and Helen Hughes get arty...



Head office staff at their Bicentennial Park Chrissy lunch.



...as do Kaylene Dodd; Debbie Brookfield; Phillip Svoronos and Ian Lambert.



Jane Verwoerd; Themy Soenario and Vanessa Lee



Themy Soenario; Kelly Boulton and Jenine Ryle



Shades on - Aaron Claassens; Matt Tokarczuk and Jamie Miller.

## Food Authority Netballers

So tantalisingly close, and yet so far! After stomping through the early competition, the Sweet FA netball team hit a mid-season slump, before rallying strongly. They fought their way through to the semi-finals in the Lunch Time Legends, only to be defeated in the semi-finals. Not to be deterred, a Food Authority volleyball team has arisen from the ashes. Further details contact Phil on Ext 806.



Assorted staff at the 2005 Staff Conference



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