

NSW Food Industry gets Foodwise Newsletter



Minister Ian Macdonald launches Foodwise.

A new food industry newsletter was recently launched by the NSW Food Authority to regularly update stakeholders about emerging issues and regulatory developments affecting industry.

"Foodwise" was launched by the Minister for Primary Industries, Ian Macdonald, who said it would "strengthen an already strong partnership" between the Food Authority and industry. Mr Macdonald said "Foodwise" would keep the state's food industry up-to-date on regulatory food issues as well as the activity of various industry consultative committees. Foodwise, is produced quarterly and sent to the Food Authority's partners in the dairy, meat, poultry, seafood & shellfish and egg industries. Other partners in catering, child care, hospital and aged care facilities, as well as local government and community groups, are also receiving the newsletter.

"Foodwise" is being e-mailed and print copies are distributed across NSW. It is also available on the Food Authority's web site at www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au.

Food Authority Helps Develop International Mercury Message



Samara Kitchener explains how education strategies can help people enjoy the benefits of fish while reducing the risk from mercury.



Participants at the WHO mercury in fish workshop in Geneva.

The NSW Food Authority was recently asked by the world's leading health body to help devise communication solutions so other countries can show people how to safely eat fish while reducing the risk from mercury. The World Health Organisation (WHO) invited the Food Authority to participate in a Geneva-workshop following the success of the Authority's Mercury in Fish campaign, which recently won a national award for excellence. Executive Director of Corporate and Consumer Services, Samara Kitchener, outlined how the innovative campaign dispelled misunderstanding about mercury in fish. Ms Kitchener said many countries were struggling to inform consumers how to balance the healthy benefits of fish while reducing the risk from mercury.

The Food Authority's Mercury Campaign, which was launched in May 2005, showed pregnant and breast-feeding women how to enjoy the healthy benefits of fish, such as Omega 3, while reducing mercury.

"Unfortunately there was a great deal of fear and misunderstanding before the campaign and our research showed many women stopped eating fish altogether and sacrificed all the great health benefits," Ms Kitchener said.

"Our campaign provided science-based advice that was easy to follow, so women could make healthy choices. Mercury in fish is not an issue for the general population, and the campaign addressed this from the beginning. Key to its success was the support of a broad coalition of industry, consumer and medical groups, who joined the Food Authority to drive an important public health message.

"The Food Authority produced 500,000 wallet cards featuring the dietary advice, and these have been distributed across NSW by our partners, fish retailers and Coles Supermarkets." *Food Authority conducts WHO Risk Communication workshops in China and South Korea. Page Three.*





OUTCOMES/PROJECTS

Expert Panel Advises Food Authority on Dioxins



Expert Dioxin Panel Chairman, Professor Brian Priestly, and Food Authority Director- General George Davey.

All commercial fishing in Sydney Harbour ceased in January after testing by the NSW Food Authority detected elevated levels of dioxins in some fish and seafood. The area affected includes all of Port Jackson (Sydney Harbour) and its tributaries. The Minister for Primary Industries, Ian Macdonald, announced the ban after the Food Authority received advice from an Expert Panel of leading toxicologists. The Authority convened the panel to provide its scientists with independent advice on the dioxin issue. The panel, which was chaired by Professor Brian Priestly, of the Department of Epidemiology and Preventative Medicine - Monash University, comprised toxicologists as well as science representatives from FSANZ and NSW Government agencies including the Food Authority; NSW Health; Department of Conservation & Environment and the Department of Primary Industries. The panel, which held regular meetings to review the test results and consider overseas dioxin guidelines, focussed on safe exposure levels, environmental issues and dietary considerations. A final report was presented to Minister Macdonald. Sydney Harbour will remain 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.

Keep it Cool!



Meet Chilly, one of a series of characters developed by the Food Authority to help reinforce basic food safety tips. To be launched at the Royal Show in April, the three consumer-friendly characters aim to get people of all ages thinking about food safety. Chilly will be joined by a dragon and platypus to promote hand washing and basic temperature control.

Dairy Industry Conference Meeting



Primary Industries Minister Ian Macdonald met new members of the NSW Dairy Industry Conference at the Food Authority's Newington head office. Mr Macdonald joined DG George Davey in meeting the new members, who will sit for the next 12 months to consider a range of issues affecting the dairy industry.

Food-Borne Illness Snapshot

The Food Authority's FBI team investigated 104 food poisoning cases in January, compared to 89 in December. Cases examined by the team include a suspected *norovirus* incident notified to the Authority's Consumer & Industry Contact Centre (CICC). Further investigation revealed a person-to-person viral infection was the likely culprit at two cafes in Sydney. The FBI team inspected the cafes and issued improvement notices. In a separate incident, the Authority's CICC was notified about a case involving a restaurant on the Central Coast. The FBI team suspected an unidentified food pathogen had taken hold due to possible temperature abuse of rice and batter, coupled with inadequate hygiene. The restaurant was inspected and given a verbal warning.

Oyster Industry Initiatives

The status of oyster harvest areas across NSW is now being published on the Food Authority's web site. This means oyster farmers can check on the status of harvest areas 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Importantly, this will boost food safety by helping farmers comply with harvest area closures. A number of farmers have told the Authority's shellfish team that information on the web site about the status of other estuaries helps them identify potential marketing opportunities. To help keep the industry better informed of harvest area closures and openings, the Food Authority's shellfish team have been sending farmers SMS messages direct to their mobile phones. Harvest areas are frequently closed following heavy rain, or other events that can affect local water quality. At present SMS messages are sent manually to all farmers with mobile phones and the Authority hopes an automated closure/opening SMS system will be established in the near future.

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



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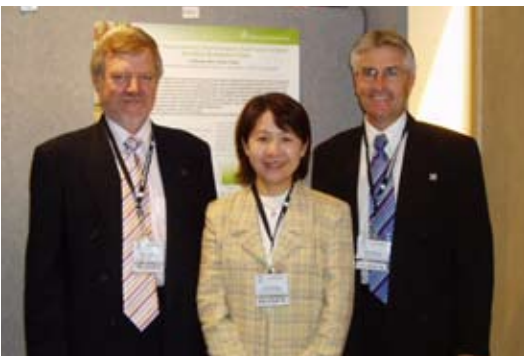
Food Microbiology Conferences



NSW Food Authority Chief Scientist - Dr Lisa Szabo



Marianne Tegel; Dr David Miles and Chris Chan



George Davey, Dr Fumiko Kasuga, National Institute of Health Sciences, Japan, and Peter Sutherland

Food Authority staff were heavily involved in the recent 12th Australian Food Microbiology Conference and 2nd International Conference on Microbial Risk Assessment: Foodborne Hazards, held concurrently in Sydney. The following staff submitted papers or posters for inclusion in the Conferences; Dr Craig Shadbolt; Michelle Keygan; Peter Sutherland; Dr Lisa Szabo; Bruce Nelan; Samara Kitchener; Marianne Tegel; Dr David Miles; Chris Chan; Catherine Bass and Themy Soenario. The Australian Food Microbiology Conference is held every four years and highlights recent information and issues relating to Food Microbiology and Food Safety. The International Conference on Microbial Risk Assessment: Foodborne Hazards was previously held in Maryland, USA.

Food Authority Helps Asia Manage Emerging Food Risks



Samara Kitchener discusses food safety and the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games with the Beijing Food Authority.



Catrin May conducts the WHO Risk Communication Workshop in Seoul.

The NSW Food Authority recently participated in a key World Health Organisation (WHO) sponsored project to help China develop communication strategies during food crises and crises associated with food production such as a bird flu outbreak.

The Authority's Executive Director of Corporate and Consumer Services, Samara Kitchener, conducted a workshop in Guangzhou to show officials of the State Food and Drug Administration and representatives from each Province how risk communication is critical to reducing panic during a food crisis.

Ms Kitchener took Chinese officials through various food safety scenarios to help them better understand the importance of communication in times of crisis. She also met to discuss food safety with organisers of the Beijing Olympic Games. Separately, the Authority's Consumer Education Manager Catrin May, conducted a similar workshop in Seoul, South Korea.

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Overseas Visitor



George Davey with Emma Rutter and Bob Grey.

Nuffield Scholar Emma Rutter visited the NSW Food Authority in February and met Milk Marketing (NSW) Pty Limited Directors George Davey and Bob Grey. Emma is a Dairy Policy Officer with the UK National Farmers Union and is undertaking a six week Nuffield sponsored study tour of the USA, New Zealand and Australia to examine milk markets. She will also be visiting several European countries as part of her project entitled "Marketing of Milk - the Dilemma between Positioning of Dairy Products as Healthy and Nutritional or for Pleasure".

Media Round Up

With summer and the barbecue season approaching, the Authority thought it would be interesting to conduct a snap consumer survey around public parks in Sydney to check the temperature of people's snaggers, chicken and patties. The survey found that nearly 19% of 198 barbecue samples were under cooked and posed a potential food poisoning risk. Even more worrying, the survey found more than 40% of weekend barbecues risked food poisoning due to "cross contamination" between raw and cooked meats. The story was reported nationally across radio, print and television, with a total potential audience of 5.5 million.

Strategic Planning

A Strategic Planning session was held with staff to develop the Authority's Strategic plan for 2006-2009. The Strategic Plan included 11 "interim Milestones" to be achieved by June 2007: **Baseline level of foodborne illness in NSW established; Transition to approved auditor system underway; Enforcement model for approved auditor system implemented; Local Government framework implemented; Agency repositioned to support new partnership model (external profile and internal culture); Scheme evaluation program implemented; Consumer Education Program Developed; New and long-term science strategy developed; Workforce development program commenced; Options for alternative funding sources scoped; Results and services plan operational.** Project plans are being developed for each of these areas. Executive felt coordination between the projects is essential to ensure the objectives of the strategic plan are met by 2009. To ensure coordination and communication between projects, Executive established a part time role

Authority Staff

of Strategic Projects Co-ordinator to work with Executive and the project leaders. The role will be jointly undertaken by Themy Soenario from Policy and Science and Kelly Collins from Operations. This joint approach will enable even more coordination between the branches in completing the strategic projects.

Transitions



Lesina Wang and Edwina Mulhearn

Farewell to Edwina Mulhearn and Lesina Wang. Edwina has left the Authority to further her career with AQIS. Edwina has been with the organisation and its predecessors for 24 years. Edwina was a trail blazer, being the first female field officer/food safety officer appointed. Lesina is leaving the Authority to move to Brisbane. And congratulations to David Hook, who was recently married!

Have Your Say on the Intranet!

The 2 Working Groups established last year have been working hard gathering information about intranets and visiting other government agencies to examine the design and management of intranets. The groups have been researching how intranets work, their features and components. The User Working group has identified the following business needs for NSWFA in order of priority: Encourage knowledge exchange across Authority; increase employee satisfaction; increase efficiency; promote cohesion; enhance knowledge management and learning by individuals; improve customer service; support decision making and planning; easy access to policies, guidelines, forms, organisation structure, work-in-progress; efficient communication between employees and reduced operational costs. As these business needs will drive the direction and eventual structure of the intranet, we are seeking your feedback. Any comments you have on these business needs, priorities or any other suggestions about the intranet can be e-mailed to "Intranet Suggestion Box" in the Global Address List. Once these business needs are validated, we will proceed with the design and acquire the tools and resources. The Implementation Working Group is identifying the scope of the tools required for the intranet's on-going operation. The Intranet Sub-Project remains on schedule for a soft launch planned for June/July this year. The implementation will be staged with various components going live progressively over the rest of the year.