

NSW Seafood Industry Forum

Wednesday 30 April 2014

Summary of meeting outcomes

The NSW Seafood Industry Forum (SIF) held a meeting in Sydney on Wednesday, 30 April 2014. Specific issues considered by the Forum at its meeting are detailed below.

NSW Food Authority food safety program compliance report

The Forum received a report on the Authority's seafood compliance, enforcement and inspection activities during the period 1 July to 31 December 2013. It was noted that during the period there had been 264 acceptable rated audits out of which there were only 12 failed audits (4.3%). The Authority was comfortable with this audit failure rate in comparison with the previous period which was 5.9%. There were 354 inspections during the period with a 1.2% failure rate.

Members also noted graphs showing the distribution of 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' audits for each licence permission audited during the period and the percentage of critical Corrective Action Requests issued across the sector by category. Process control continues to be the main area in which Critical CARs are raised.

Members noted that the major areas of non-compliance across all seafood businesses during the period were in relation to pre-requisite programs, process control and construction and maintenance. For seafood processing businesses, the major areas were construction and maintenance (with 87% not complying with requirements), analytical and testing and product ID and traceability. With seafood processing RTE businesses, analytical and testing, temperature control issues and documentation of food safety programs were the main areas requiring attention. A breakdown of enforcement activities during the period was also presented.

The Forum was advised that with the BYTE mobile system now in place all audit data is captured in the Authority's data base; this will enable the Authority's officers to formulate programs associated with those areas that need to be targeted to assist industry.

Forum members noted that overall the actual numbers of failures during the period were very low which is a good result for the industry.

Aquaculture businesses

The Forum received papers from the NSW Food Authority and NSW Aquaculture Association following concerns raised by the aquaculture sector at the previous meeting that some aquaculture businesses are producing seafood products for sale as food without holding the required licence with the Authority to conduct these operations. The issue was raised due to its potential to become a problem in the future if it is not appropriately regulated. Members noted that the Authority will commence a compliance program in 2014 that will include the other relevant agencies involved in the regulation of aquaculture businesses. The papers were noted and the Authority will keep a watch on this and report back on any issues that may arise.

Multiple boat licences

Following a request at the last Forum meeting for clarification on the Authority's process in relation to seafood licensing arrangements for commercial fishers with multiple boat licences, members were advised that an article on licensing requirements for seafood vessels and premises had been published in the latest edition of *Foodwise*. The information was noted.

Ciguatera outbreaks

Members noted a detailed report on two notifications of ciguatera food poisoning outbreaks in NSW from the consumption of Spanish Mackerel caught in NSW waters. Both incidents had demonstrated a fine example of the recall process as the Authority had been able to trace back to the fishermen who had caught the fish implicated in the outbreaks and the retailers who had sold them. It was noted that due to this situation the Sydney Fish Market had undertaken a risk assessment review and modified its ciguatera risk controls by restricting the sale of large Spanish Mackerel greater than 10kg. The Authority has since provided advice to fishers through its website and various industry and media channels on the risks of consuming Spanish Mackerel over 10kg in weight.

Members also received an update on work currently underway by the Sydney Fish Market to manage this issue. A proposal developed by SafeFish technical experts to address seafood industry risk management strategies and guidelines for ciguatoxins in finfish was tabled for information.

Labelling requirements for unpackaged produce

The Forum received a report on the labelling requirements for unpackaged produce following a request for this information at their last meeting. Members were advised of a Federal government enquiry currently underway into Country of Origin Labelling, which has come about due to perceived widespread community misinterpretation of the terms 'Product of Australia', 'Made in Australia' and 'Made from Australian and imported ingredients'. The Authority is making a submission to this enquiry and members were also encouraged to do so.

There was considerable discussion amongst members on the meaning of the definitions 'Product of' and 'Made in' in relation to Country of Origin claims. Specifically clarification was sought on the labelling of seafood that is caught in Australia, sent overseas for processing, and then brought back to Australia for sale. Concerns were raised on the implications for retailers who sell product which is believed to be labelled correctly but is in fact found to be not in compliance with labelling laws. It was agreed that the Authority will provide further information on this issue at the next Forum meeting.

Indigenous fishing sector harvesting of pipis

Members noted a paper tabled following discussion at the last Forum meeting on the increased interest in harvesting and selling pipis by the indigenous fishing sector in NSW. It was advised that anyone selling pipis commercially must comply with the provisions of *Food Regulation 2010* which are that they must be licensed and implement a Food Safety Plan and biotoxin management program. They must also only harvest from areas approved by the Authority; when an algal bloom occurs joint messages will go out from the Authority and NSW DPI Fisheries to the commercial sector, recreational fishermen and business community not to harvest pipis in this occasion.

Guidelines for thawing and refreezing product

Clarification was sought from one of the Forum members on the definitions of 'thawed', 'frozen' and if there are any requirements to display product as being thawed. It was agreed that the Authority will provide information to the next meeting on guidelines for thawing and refreezing product and investigate if there are requirements to label product for sale as being thawed.

Guidelines for sashimi

Forum members requested further information in relation to guidelines and critical safety control measures for sashimi fish. The Authority undertook to provide further information on this issue to the next meeting, in conjunction with the Sydney Fish Market who have well defined product specification guidelines for sashimi in place.

The next meeting of the NSW Seafood Industry Forum will be held on Wednesday 24 September 2014.