

# Summary of Outcomes

## Food Regulation Forum (the Forum)

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Date: **Tuesday, 19 June 2025**

Time: 9:30am-11:30am

### Members present:

Cr Claire Pontin (Chair)	
Mr Andrew Davies	NSW Food Authority
Mr Greg Vakaci	NSW Food Authority
Ms Erin Hogan	Environmental Health Australia
Mr Hugh Waters	Environmental Health Australia
Cr Dr Elizabeth Adamczyk	Local Government NSW
Mr Peter Fitzgerald	Local Government Professionals Australia
Ms Fiona Stalgis	Development and Environmental Professionals' Association

### Guests present:

Ms Ruth Houston	NSW Food Authority
Mr David Cusack	NSW Food Authority
Mr Eric Davis	NSW Food Authority
Ms Josie Rizzo	NSW Food Authority
Ms Karen Purcell	NSW Food Authority
Ms Katherine Gash	NSW Food Authority

### Apologies:

Cr Jay Suvaal	Local Government NSW
Cr Phyllis Miller	Local Government NSW
Ms Geneveive Taylor	Local Government Professionals Australia
Ms Sally-Anne Donahue	Development and Environmental Professionals' Association

## 1. Welcome, introductions, apologies

Chair, Claire Pontin opened the meeting at 9.30am, welcomed all attendees to the meeting and noted the apologies.

### Summary of Outcomes from last meeting (26 November 2024)

The Summary of Outcomes document was endorsed as true and correct, moved Elizabeth Adamczyk, seconded Greg Vakaci.

## 2. Information items

### 2.1 State Liaison Group Meetings 10 December 2024, 26 February 2025, and 22 May 2025

Ruth Houston spoke to the report and provided an overview of the three sets of minutes from the State Liaison Group meetings, noting that most items raised would be discussed in this meeting. She invited questions or comments; however, none were raised.

### 2.2 Food Regulation Partnership

#### 2.2a FRP Web Hub

Ruth Houston spoke to the report and offered an update on the development of a new FRP web hub for local government authorised officers, which will replace the current FRP portal. The new platform will be accessible without the need for login credentials, streamlining access to key resources to support authorised officers in their roles. Sensitive information such as training materials will be housed in a dedicated FRP library, accessible via a single secure link.

Communication to authorised officers is planned to support a smooth transition to the new platform.

#### 2.2b FRP News Bites

Ruth Houston announced the introduction of a new quarterly communication titled "*FRP News Bites*", designed for local government authorised officers to strengthen collaboration and provide timely updates on relevant matters. The initiative has been well received, with positive feedback from officers who value the enhanced communication and engagement. The next edition is scheduled for circulation in August–September, and will include key diary dates, updates from the Food Authority, and other pertinent information.

**ACTION:** Food Authority to consider collecting feedback from EHOs on the effectiveness of the News Bites communication towards the end of the year.

The report was moved by Liz Adamczyk, seconded by Peter Fitzgerald.

### 2.3 Training to Authorised Officers 2024/25

Ruth Houston provided an overview of the authorised officer professional development programs, highlighting recent and upcoming activities. The recently held Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) workshop as part of Round 1 Regional Food Group (RFG) training was very well received by participants. Fiona Stalgis agreed. The workshop focused on resolving common issues encountered by authorised officers.

Upcoming training sessions, scheduled for Round 2, 2025 will address food handling practices related to açai and kebabs. This content is particularly relevant in light of recent foodborne illness outbreaks associated with açai in the retail sector and is considered timely in the lead-up to summer.

Suggestions for further professional development topics were welcomed. Hugh Waters proposed formalising the training into a recognised qualification to ensure consistency for food shop inspections across local government. Ruth Houston advised the professional development offered by the NSW Food Authority is designed to align with the *NSW Food Act 2003* and as the Food Authority is not a registered training organisation (RTO) it cannot offer accredited training. The report was moved by Fiona Stalgis, seconded by Peter Fitzgerald.

Ruth Houston noted the high completion rate of the current authorised officer course, with 41 of 50 enrolled officers successfully completing the program and receiving their certificates for 2025 course to date. A new intake of officers is planned towards the end of the year for the 2026 course.

### **3. Discussion items**

#### **3.1 FRP Workshop 2025**

Josie Rizzo provided an overview of the successful biennial FRP Workshop held in April, which attracted 183 delegates and received highly positive feedback. The workshop featured a comprehensive program covering a broad range of topics, along with three hands-on sessions that encouraged practical learning and engagement.

A dedicated working group comprising of volunteer Council officers played a key role in developing and delivering the program. Their contributions were acknowledged and valued, significantly contributing to the success of the event.

The program included presentations from a diverse mix of speakers, including representatives from local Councils, the NSW Food Authority, DPIRD, and external subject matter experts. Feedback was collected via hard copy evaluation forms, with a response rate exceeding 50%. Of those who responded, more than 90% rated the workshop content as excellent or very good, and 84% indicated they would attend future workshops. The Chair noted the positive feedback and high-level of responses and endorsed the NSW Food Authority to continue hosting the biennial FRP Workshop.

As part of the event, the FRP Food Surveillance Champion Awards were presented to recognise outstanding contributions to the program. The awards were well received and appreciated by attendees. Moved by Erin Hogan, seconded by Greg Vakaci.

### 3.2 Retail and food service information sessions for 2025/26

Katherine Gash spoke to the report and provided an update on the retail information sessions, noting the success of the February 2025 session held in Yass that attracted fifty-five registrations. Upcoming sessions are scheduled for Canterbury Bankstown on 24 June and Hornsby in late October 2025.

Katherine highlighted a significant improvement in attendees' knowledge of food safety, with evaluation data indicating a 50% increase from the beginning to the end of the session. This outcome was measured using a participant evaluation form introduced last year.

Expressions of interest for the next round of sessions, including early 2027, will open on 8 September 2025. This report was moved by Fiona Stalgis and seconded by Liz Adamczyk.

### 3.3 Childcare Services Survey Project

Josie Rizzo spoke to the paper and introduced the Childcare Services Survey Project, which aims to assess food safety compliance across various childcare settings, including after-school care and family daycare services. The project will be implemented in Round 3 of the RFGs this year, with participating volunteer councils responsible for completing an online survey and conducting environmental swabbing as part of the data collection process.

The Chair invited Forum members to contribute and provide feedback to the project. Fiona Stalgis raised concerns on handwashing in school canteens, family daycares and OOSHs'. Peter Fitzgerald advised Cumberland Council would be happy to participate in the trial, including piloting the survey. Moved by Fiona Stalgis.

### 3.4 EPA Food Organics Garden Organics (FOGO) mandate

Eric Davis provided an update on the EPA's engagement with the Food Authority concerning the implementation of the FOGO (Food Organics Garden Organics) mandate. He highlighted key challenges, including the absence of a cost recovery model and a defined compliance strategy, as well as the need to build Environmental Health Officer (EHO) capacity to support the implementation. Ongoing discussions between the Food Authority and the EPA, (including their compliance team) are scheduled to continue in July. Greg Vakaci requested to attend this meeting.

**ACTION:** Eric Davis to invite Greg Vakaci to next EPA meeting.

The Chair and Hugh Waters noted that often cost shifting of initiatives is directed to local councils and their ratepayers, with small Council EHOs at capacity. The NSW Food Authorities stance on this matter was noted and appreciated.

Discussion also included a central database that would capture not only food inspections, but also other EHO areas and electronic FPARs into a central system that could manage invoicing, reporting, and data analysis. Enterprise Creative Cloud have designed a central platform that is currently being piloted in several Councils. The EPA have government funding could be used to implement FOGO reporting and also incorporate food safety and other EHO functions.

**ACTION:** The Chair requested Eric Davis provide an update on the EPA engagement regarding the FOGO mandate after the next meeting with the EPA.

Liz Adamczyk noted that she and Claire Pontin are both Council appointees and can raise issues like this at their Local Government annual conference later this year.

**ACTION:** Liz Adamczyk and Claire Pontin, discuss and potentially draft motions for the LG NSW Conference to address cost shifting and other concerns related to the FOGO mandate.

Moved by Hugh Waters, seconded by Liz Adamczyk.

## 4. Standing items

### 4.1 Organisation updates

- Erin Hogan noted that Environmental Health Australia (EHA) NSW will be hosting next year's national conference in October in Canberra which is also the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of EHA.
- Fiona Stalgis noted EHOs are under pressure to finalise food inspections before the end of financial year reporting and acknowledged all EHOs in the field completing these inspections.
- Greg Vakaci provided the following update on recent food safety matters and illness investigations relevant to Council activities:
  - ***Salmonella Typhimurium***: Investigations were conducted into multiple cases linked to food consumed at three separate retail chains in the Sydney metropolitan area. Trace-back efforts with NSW Health have identified a potential source at a farm producing coriander.
  - **Plant Product Recalls and *E. coli* (STEC)**: Several food recalls involving plant-based products were managed, including a national investigation into baby spinach contaminated with Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli*. Although the issue originated from on-farm processes in Victoria and processors in Queensland, the Food Authority has initiated proactive inspections of licensed plant product processors within NSW.
  - **Brucellosis Investigation**: A *Brucellosis* case was traced to a home-based business engaged in unauthorised dairy product processing. A prohibition order was issued against the premises due to non-compliance with licensing requirements.

- **Raw Milk Enforcement:** Raw milk was recently seized, and an investigation is underway into the distributor. This is the first significant enforcement action in this area since changes were made to legislation following the 2014 fatality of a child in Victoria from consuming unregulated raw milk. It is suspected that unlicensed distribution continues, with products originating from Queensland. Members are encouraged to report any sightings or concerns.
- Food Regulation 2025 Update: David Cusack provided a comprehensive update on the remake of the Food Regulation, including the introduction of a fee for lifting prohibition orders, adjustments to fee benchmarks, and updates to penalty notice amounts. The new regulation is on track for delivery in early September.
- Andrew Davies informed the Forum of the organisational changes within the NSW Food Authority, including the appointment of Dr Lisa Szabo as the Executive Director, Biosecurity and Food Safety and the ongoing proposed recruitment for the position of CEO.

## 5. General business

### 5.1 Any other business

#### 5.1a FSS Certificate Project

David Cusack presented the new FSS certificate project, which introduces QR codes and a manual entry online system for instant validation of certificates effect 1 July 2025. The project aims to enhance fraud protection and improve efficiency for authorised officers. A 'cheat sheet' is available for authorised officers on the Food Authority website and the FRP library.

#### 5.1b Activity Report Update

Josie advised that councils are to submit their annual activity reports for the period 31 July 2024 to 30 June 2025 by 28th July and highlighted the addition of two new questions to gauge the proportion of food work undertaken by EHOs.

#### 5.1c Emerging Issues

Fiona Stalgis raised concerns regarding the increase in home food businesses and the need for a review of legislation and procedures.

Fiona Stalgis also raised the revision of Australian Standard (AS) 4674 and encouraged the NSW Food Authority to participate in the review.

***ACTION:*** Ruth Houston to provide a response on the need for a review of the regulation of homebased businesses under the *Food Act 2003*.

- ***RESPONSE:*** The Food Authority acknowledges the complexities of regulating home-based businesses and will commit to a review of the FRP policies and procedures in 2025/26.

***ACTION:*** Ruth Houston to provide a response on the participation of the Food Authority in the review of AS 4674.

- ***RESPONSE:*** Andrew Davies has been representing the NSW Food Authority on the AS 4674 Project Working Group and has now passed the role to Ruth Houston.

## **5.2 Next meeting**

The next Food Regulation Forum will be on Tuesday, 18 November 2025, 10am – 12 noon.

## **6. Close of meeting**

Meeting closed at 10.46am.