

Summary of meeting outcomes

NSW Seafood Industry Forum

16 September 2020

The NSW Seafood Industry Forum held a meeting via video conference on 16 September 2020. Specific issues considered by the Forum at its meeting are outlined below.

Attendees

NSW Seafood Industry Forum members: Tricia Beatty (Professional Fisher's Association Inc), Mark Boulter (Seafood Importers' Association of Australasia Inc), Michael Kitchener (The Master Fish Merchants' Association of Australia), Robert McCormack (NSW Aquaculture Association Inc).

NSW DPI – Biosecurity & Food Safety: David Cusack (Chair - Manager Food Standards & Programs), Ian Sanders (Director International Engagement), Helen Chen (Senior Project Officer International Engagement), Melissa Walker (Team Leader Aquatic Biosecurity Policy & Programs), Suzanne Robinson (Director Animal Welfare), Jeffrey Go (Senior Veterinary Officer Aquatic Biosecurity), Jenine Ryle (Senior Policy and Programs Officer), Patrick Phillips (Systems Integrity Officer), Jaime Garcia (Secretariat).

Apologies: Lisa Szabo (Director Food Safety & CEO NSW Food Authority), Peter Day (Director Compliance & Integrity Systems), Mark Mackie (Manager Audit Systems & Verification), Geneveive Bonello (Principal Project Officer), Sarah Britton (NSW Chief Veterinary Officer and Group Director Animal Biosecurity), Anne McIntosh (Manager Food Incident Response and Complaints), Olivia Churchill (De Costi Seafoods/Tassal Group Ltd), Ross Fidden (Commercial Fishermen's Co-operative Ltd), Erik Poole (Sydney Fish Market Pty Ltd), Kerry Strangas (The Master Fish Merchants Association).

Industry updates

Members provided updates on key and emerging issues in their respective industry sectors with COVID-19 remaining a focus of discussion. Members discussed issues with labour shortages across the industry and with state border closures and associated restrictions.

Members continue to note a decrease in sales to the hospitality, food service and export sectors (including other states – Melbourne trade has been down with Victorian lockdown restrictions) however retail and regional sales have increased. Industry continues to adapt to address issues affecting their operations. Initiatives include diversifying supply lines/markets (redesigning product packaging to be 'retail ready' - product can then be supplied to the food service sector or independent grocers depending on demand) and moving to on-line marketing/auctions (important contingency measures should major retail trade markets be impacted and closed for deep cleaning in accordance with COVID-19 Safety Plans).

The Recovery and Stimulation Package announcement (including industry fee waivers), NSW Going Global Business Program and the NSW Export Assistance Grant Program were discussed in relation to COVID-19 assistance to industry.

Members were provided with a Resource Paper with key links to published COVID-19 information to support the NSW food industry including [advice for businesses](#) on food safety aspects of COVID-19, workforce management and regulatory obligations.

- The COVID-19 Primary Industries Liaison Team can be contacted by emailing covidinfo@dpi.nsw.gov.au
- online resource COVID-19 advice can be accessed at dpi.nsw.gov.au/home/covid-19

Members noted that Biosecurity and Food Safety (BFS) Officers are authorised under the *Public Health Act 2010* to ensure food businesses have a COVID-19 Safety Plan in place. Patrick Phillips outlined that Officers have been conducting proactive visits to food retail businesses and licensees and that COVID-19 Safety Plan compliance will remain an ongoing focus of the Department's audit program.

Food Safety Compliance Report

The Committee noted a report on seafood industry compliance activities for the 2019-20 financial year. Members noted that 97% of the licensed seafood sector recorded an acceptable audit and/or inspection result which is an increase of 1% from the previous period. It was noted that there was a reduction in audit and inspection figures for the March to June 2020 period as BFS Officers focused on COVID-19 safety plan auditing.

During the reporting period, 249 inspections were conducted of fishing vessels which recorded a high compliance rate of 99%. The Compliance & Integrity Systems Team continues to focus its efforts around inspections of fishing vessels so that a high compliance rate can be maintained within this sector.

The top four audit items with higher observed levels of critical issues during the reporting period continue to be within process control (46%), food safety program (34%), analytical and testing (14%) and pre-requisite programs (6%). Enforcement actions during the period included 13 Improvement Notices and two warning letters and one Penalty Notice. The Compliance Team is very satisfied with the high compliance rate recorded for the seafood industry sector during this reporting period.

Biosecurity Update

Members noted future surveillance plans to localise the White Spot Disease (WSD) detection area in southeast Queensland. Targeted testing of school prawns to the north and the south of the infected area (which could include the Richmond River in NSW) will assist to demonstrate to Australia's trading partners the ongoing WSD free status in the rest of the country.

Members also noted education efforts to ensure that live seafood products aren't released into the wild which poses biosecurity issues and is an illegal practice in NSW. This followed a recent incident in Sydney where commercially farmed abalone were taken from a market and released in waterways.

Melissa Walker informed members on the development of a new NSW Biosecurity Plan and will keep the Forum informed on further developments in this area.

International Engagement Update

Helen Chen outlined two recent promotional events organised by the International Engagement Team:

- Marketing event (28,29 July 2020) - First NSW seafood industry briefing on an ONLINE Expo with two VIRTUAL business matchings at the 'China Seafood Expo 2020 Online' hosted by China Aquatic Products Processing and Marketing Alliance and organised by NSW DPI.
- Market education event (3 September 2020) - NSW oyster export market workshop.

The date for the next meeting of the NSW Seafood Industry Forum is to be advised.