

Summary of meeting outcomes

Food Regulation Forum

Monday 30th November 2020

The Food Regulation Forum oversees the work of the Food Regulation Partnership (FRP). The latest meeting was held via teleconference due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.

Forum members present at the meeting were:

Mr Paul Braybrooks OAM (Chair), Mr Damian Thomas, Local Government NSW, Mr Angus Crichton, Environmental Health Australia, Erin Hogan, Environmental Health Australia, Dr Lisa Szabo (NSW Food Authority)

Guests present: Mr Andrew Davies, NSW Food Authority, Ms Josie Rizzo, NSW Food Authority, Ms Ruth Endicott, NSW Food Authority

Apologies: Chris Lamont, NSW Small Business Commission, Cr Ruth Fagan, Local Government NSW, Cr Paul Harmon, Local Government NSW, Ms Fiona Stalgis, Development and Environmental Professionals' Association, Ms Julie Kisa, Development and Environmental Professionals' Association, Ms Gina McConkey, Local Government Professionals Australia, Mr Peter Day, NSW Food Authority, Lisa Hughes, Environmental Health Australia

The outcomes from the latest meeting were noted and discussed by the Forum. Discussion points included:

COVID-19 in the food sector

Forum members were informed that COVID-19 continues to affect the food retail sector.

The COVID-19 Public Health Orders 2020 impacting retail food businesses remain in place. The principal requirements of 'hospitality premises' (which includes cafes and restaurants) needing to develop and register a COVID Safety Plan are unchanged.

Businesses must adequately manage social distancing, health and hygiene and recordkeeping requirements. The demand for information and training has been high:

- The Food Authority's *COVID-19 awareness for food service* – a free, voluntary online training course to support the retail food sector has seen over 33,000 enrolments since 2 June 2020.
- The *Food businesses and COVID-19 webpage* providing advice for businesses on food safety aspects of COVID-19, workforce management and regulatory obligations has seen 60,000 unique visits since 24 March 2020.

In total there have been over 23,000 COVID-19 inspections in NSW recording a 73% compliance rate. Over 3,600 of these inspections were at NSW cafes and restaurants.

There have been 333 penalty infringement notices issued for COVID-19 matters.

Local government's advisory and guidance role for COVID-19 Safety Plan inspections remains unchanged.

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Local government continues to play its part with almost 5,000 formal inspections undertaken with around a 61% compliance rate. The 2 main areas of non-compliance found by local government are a lack of a COVID-19 safety plan and inadequate recordkeeping. Council staff are asked to address any areas of non-conformance using their close relationships with the businesses in their local government area.

The Food Authority continues to engage with local councils by answering enquiries and passing on those experiences to inter-agency working group. The Food Authority will engage further with local councils and other stakeholders in 2021 to explore the need for a more permanent arrangement for balancing COVID-19 and food surveillance activities and responsibilities.

Authorised Officer Training Update

Members were appraised of the latest developments.

To support Environmental Health Officers with this requirement the Food Authority delivers the Authorised Officer (Local Government) Food Surveillance training course (Authorised Officer training). This program helps enforcement agencies to build capacity for their authorised officers. It provides a pathway for both new and experienced officers to gain or refresh their skills and knowledge in order to competently conduct food surveillance activities.

Due to COVID-19 pandemic the Authorised Officer training course was revised and redeveloped to be run as a series of 21 weekly webinars. Each 2.5hr webinar consisted of a presentation, workshop activity and opportunities for discussion. There were 42 delegates enrolled in the course.

Each training webinar has been recorded and is available for all authorised officers to access on demand.

The Food Authority is currently exploring opportunities to develop the course as an online course. Further progress is expected throughout 2021 and Forum members will be provided regular updates.

Bellingen Shire Council Resilience Program

Members were informed of the NSW Food Authority's contribution to Bellingen Shire Council's Resilience & Food Safety Forum on 24 November 2020.

The session delivered food safety information to the small community of growers and food retailers from around the Bellingen region. The contribution further strengthened the Food Authority's partnership with local councils.

Activity reporting from enforcement agencies 2019-20

All enforcement agencies (Councils and Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH, in respect of Kosciuszko National Park)) are required to report annually to the NSW Food Authority on their activities.

There are 132 areas in NSW regulated by 128 councils, OEH, Lord Howe Island Board (in respect of Lord Howe Island), and the Food Authority (in respect of Sydney Harbour Federation Trust and the unincorporated far west).

Forum members were provided with an update of the latest data. A summary report is available [here](#).

Food Regulation Partnership – survey 2020

The Food Authority conducted a survey of local government partners. The aim of the survey was to identify what is working well and where improvements can be made in relation to the FRP and the services provided by the NSW Food Authority Local Government Unit (LGU).

Results of the survey is complex, and a comprehensive report is currently being drafted. A total of 217 respondents participated from 106 councils.

Some high-level key findings include:

- Majority of respondents felt that the LGU services, materials and support is either very effective (21%) or effective (62%)
- Training is highly regarded and wanted – request for more advanced training
- Need for central database with online mobile device
- Concerns exist surrounding consistency in approach between enforcement agencies
- Many requests for information and resources from officers that already exist

Forum members were provided an update and will be informed once the report is complete.

FRP Workshop 2021

The inaugural biennial FRP Workshop was held in 2013, a total of four have been held, and all have been very successful. The next is scheduled for 2021.

The aim of the FRP Workshop is to enhance Environmental Health Officers' (EHOs) food surveillance capacity, promote professional networking between EHOs, and strengthen the Food Regulation Partnership between councils and The Food Authority. It also provides opportunity for consultation on key messages and issues, to a large group of stakeholders at the one time.

The 2021 workshop will be held in Sydney. A working group has been established to develop the program. The theme will be based around "*Let's stick together*", "*Building resilience*" and "*Preparedness in a disaster*".

A draft program is developing and includes a variety of technical sessions and some topical tours.

Appropriate venues are being explored and a social program is being considered. The Forum will be appraised on further developments into 2021.

Regional Food Group meetings

The Food Authority provides support to local council enforcement agencies to help them with their food surveillance activities. As part of this support the Local Government Unit initiates meetings (Regional Food Group meetings) throughout NSW. These consist of a topical professional development training session which is followed by an opportunity to discuss matters of regional importance.

Each year there are three rounds of meetings across our 16 food regions. A new training package is usually devised for each round and is developed from authorised officer feedback, emerging trends or from data analysis which signifies potential skills gaps.

Despite the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic all 2020 RFG meetings progressed as intended and many were successfully delivered online. Professional development was '*risk assessing allergens during routine food inspections*' and '*food labelling*'. All of the training materials, including a guidance document for authorised officers to use in the field, are available on the FRP Portal.

The Food Authority is currently devising its professional development schedule for 2021. Acting on previous requests, one project proposal is a 'food notification' project. Other suggestions include a refresher on 'mobile food vans' guidance and some survey work focussing on food safety culture is being considered as well.

State Liaison Group meeting 23 September 2020

Members were informed of the latest meeting held on the 23rd September 2020.

Representatives from the NSW Regional Food Groups (RFGs) of Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) met on to discuss operation matters of state-wide significance.

The main points of discussion at the most recent State Liaison Group meeting were:

- FRP update – Food Regulation Forum and Retail Information Sessions
- Council Activity Reporting 2019-2020
- COVID-19 Developments in Retail Food update
- National projects – Food Safety Culture and Food Safety Management Working Tools
- Proposed project – Notification generally and regulation of "dark/ghost" kitchens
- FRP Workshop 2021
- Training Update – RFG and authorised officer training
- LGU & FRP Survey – preliminary results
- Name and Shame update

The next meeting of the State Liaison Group will be in around March 2021. Forum members are invited to attend and observe.

Date of the next meeting

The date of the next Food Regulation Forum meeting will be into 2021. The exact date and location will be determined soon.