

Meat Industry Consultative Council

Wednesday 19 March 2014

Summary of meeting outcomes

The Meat Industry Consultative Council (MICC) held a meeting in Sydney on Wednesday, 19 March 2014. Specific issues considered by the Council at its meeting are detailed below.

Food safety program compliance report 1 July to 31 December 2013

The MICC received and noted an update on the Authority's industry compliance, enforcement and inspection activities during the period 1 July to 31 December 2013.

Figures presented in the report showed a total audit failure rate for the retail meat sector of 11%, however only one meat retail business failed a consecutive compliance audit, compared to 16 in the previous reporting period. This indicates that licensees are implementing effective corrective actions in response to audit failures. Currently 14 meat businesses are within the Audit Improvement program with a further 8 being closely monitored. The Australian Meat Industry Council (AMIC) indicated its commitment to the Authority to provide assistance in addressing the high failure rate on audits.

In the meat processing sector it was noted that process control continues to be the main area where critical Corrective Action Requests (CAR's) are issued, particularly in terms of cross contamination. This is an area where the Authority will be looking at focussing on staff training in this sector in future.

Members noted the good result in terms of the low level of failures in poultry abattoirs and the poultry sector in general, with only minor issues being raised in relation to processing.

The Council was advised that for the first time this compliance report has been able to present graphs showing a comparison of results from two reporting periods and the current set of data is very detailed compared to previous reports. It was noted that the introduction of the BYTE mobile system has resulted in improved reporting at audits and ensures that CAR's are documented against the correct audit element. The system also permits detailed reporting to be conducted on audit findings, which then informs the Authority on the reasons for audit failures and areas on which to focus its targeted programs to improve compliance across the sector. Over time the Authority will look at this and work out strategies to address these areas.

Use of BYTE Mobile as an auditing tool

The Council received a presentation on the use of BYTE Mobile, an auditing system using iPads which is now fully operational by NSW Food Authority officers when conducting audits in the field.

Members noted that there has been very positive feedback on this auditing system which is delivering efficiencies in terms of the way the Authority goes about audits and inspections. It will inform analysis and help the Authority to be more focussed on where it targets its activities in the future.

Animal welfare in non red-meat abattoirs

The MICC noted an update on animal welfare in non-red meat abattoirs following a review conducted by the Authority in 2013. The review had found that large facilities have processes in place to monitor animal welfare practices, and that the focus needs to be on smaller operators who don't have resources to put systems in place.

Members noted revised milestones under the project developed by the Authority to deliver the Authority's commitment to see animal welfare practices implemented in all facilities. The Authority will report back to the Council on progress in these areas.

Members were informed that the Authority is looking at working with the Australian Chicken Meat Federation to explore the feasibility of having the Animal Welfare Officer training resource endorsed and developed as a national training course for industry.

Country of origin labelling (CoOL) signage requirements for retail meat premises

The MICC received an update on the present position in regard to the national development of an acceptable single sign option for meat retailers selling raw meat produced in Australia, following concerns that the country of origin labelling requirement under the Food Standards Code as it now stands may become onerous for businesses that only sell raw Australian meat.

Members noted that a determination on this issue cannot be made until ACCC guidelines on country of origin labelling are finalised due to the implications in terms of consumer law and truth in labelling requirements, and it has been agreed that the signage requirements of the standard won't be enforced until such time as there is national alignment on the signage requirements with ACCC. The Authority is currently working with meat retailers via field surveys to gather information about current marketing practices and to increase awareness and educate them on the new requirements for unpackaged meat.

Sulphur dioxide compliance program for the retail meat sector

The Council noted a paper tabled on a program developed by the Authority for the retail meat sector to manage compliance with sulphur dioxide limits permitted in food under the Food Standards Code. Results of a recent survey conducted from samples taken from butcher shops were tabled for information and showed a high non-compliance rate which indicates a poor level of understanding by industry of the requirements. An Enforcement Matrix was tabled and noted; this was endorsed by AMIC.

Review of Uncooked Comminuted Fermented Meat (UCFM) processors

Members noted an update on a review of UCFM processors conducted by the Authority following the development of a new UCFM process proforma template for all licensed manufacturers of UCFM products. Information provided by manufacturers on processes was assessed against the requirements of the Food Standards Code and entered into a predictive model. Where the UCFM process is assessed as meeting the requirements of the Code an approval letter is sent to the manufacturer; this must be kept with their food safety program and made available during audits by Authority officers along with copies of their UCFM proformas.

It was noted that a good outcome of this process is that information is more freely available to the Authority's officers in the field and it is then checked in more detail at audits. It is also being used as a way to have industry seek help with meeting requirements. AMIC also indicated its support of this paper.

Key food safety indicators for the poultry industry

Council received a report proposing a revised set of Key Food Safety Indicators (KFSIs) for the poultry industry to achieve compliance with the Primary Production and Processing Standard (PPPS) for Poultry Meat, following feedback from a survey conducted in 2013. The Standard requires companies to indicate they are taking measures to reduce levels of *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* pathogens on farms. The revised KFSI's reflect the current level of testing conducted by processors so that they are not subjected to additional testing costs or requirements.

It was noted that the Authority will be holding a meeting in early May with technical representatives from the major NSW poultry producers to discuss this report and develop a 12 month trial with industry.

Primary Production and Processing Standard for Poultry Meat—implementation progress update

Members received an update on the implementation of the PPPS for Poultry Meat. It was noted that the majority of poultry facilities licensed with the Authority operate on behalf of or are owned by large poultry processing companies which have comprehensive management systems in place. These companies will have their systems assessed for compliance against the new requirements before April 2014 to ensure that they are adequate and comply with all legislative requirements. It was advised that all facilities will be inspected by an Authority officer in 2014 to ensure that all licensees are compliant with the new requirements. Data will also be collected during these inspections on industry profile and performance and will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the Poultry Standard. The Authority will work with industry on this and sees this as a joint program and would welcome comments on how this can be improved over time. Companies are working with their people and growers to reassure them through the new processes.

The next meeting of the MICC will be on Wednesday 6 August 2014.