

Summary of meeting outcomes

Meat Industry Consultative Council

Wednesday 6 August 2014

The Meat Industry Consultative Council (MICC) held a meeting in Sydney on Wednesday, 6 August 2014. Specific issues considered by the Council at its meeting are detailed below.

Food Safety Program compliance report 1 January to 30 June 2014

The Council noted the Food Safety Program compliance report for the meat and poultry sector for the period 1 January to 30 June 2014.

Activities undertaken during this period included 727 acceptable rated audits, 103 failed audits and 823 inspections. The audit failure rate for the retail meat sector of 12% indicated a slight improvement in comparison to the 13% audit failure rate for the previous period and 16% rate for the period before that. The amount of consecutive failures is decreasing, with only one meat retail business that had failed a compliance audit also failing their follow up audit. This indicates that licensees are implementing effective corrective actions in response to audit failures.

It was noted that the format of this report had changed to give a breakdown of data from a three year period to enable members to see how figures are trending. This information will improve further with more data being available through the Byte mobile system. An analysis of figures on each individual licence section showed that the main areas of non-compliance continue to be with calibration programs, annual reviews of programs and monitoring records. The Authority will target its education and training programs on these areas and provide further advice to licensees. Enforcement activities during the period included the issue of 133 improvement notices, 17 penalty notices, 3 warning letters and one product seizure.

It was noted that overall this is a positive report and the Authority would welcome any feedback from members on additional information they would like to see included in these reports.

Authorised use of photographs taken in licensed food premises

Following a question being raised at the previous meeting, members noted a paper on the Authority's position in relation to the confidentiality of information collected in food premises by its authorised officers, including photographs and recordings. It was noted that the Authority has formal direct policies and controls over what it does with information obtained from its compliance activities. The Authority's officers are authorised to take a wide range of information, provided it is obtained in connection with the administration or execution of the NSW Food Act 2003. In addition all regulatory food safety auditors are bound by a code of conduct and strict controls are in place to ensure that there is no misuse of that authority. Should any breach of these provisions occur there are very severe consequences. Members were assured that all the Authority's officers are aware of these policies.

It was also noted that where photographs are required by the Authority's Communications Branch, they would use standard industry photographs and would request permission from each industry sector for approved photographs.

Human cases of Hepatitis E linked to consumption of pork products

Members received an update on a recent foodborne illness investigation conducted by the Authority following notification by NSW Health of thirteen cases of Hepatitis E, a virus which is quite rare in Australia. In this case it took two to six weeks for the infection to develop and the common link in all cases was the consumption of a raw pork liver pate at a particular Sydney restaurant. The restaurant has now ceased the preparation of this product.

The Authority's investigations have included trace back to the farm level and the Authority is continuing to liaise with representatives from NSW Health, NSW DPI Biosecurity and Australian Pork Limited regarding systems in place to monitor this going forward.

Key Food Safety Indicators (KFSI's) in poultry processing facilities – status update

Following the presentation of a paper at the March MICC meeting on revised draft KFSI targets for poultry producers, members were updated on a meeting held between the Authority and industry on 4 June to further discuss this issue and related reporting mechanisms. It was noted this had been a positive meeting and some minor amendments to the draft KFSI and reporting frequencies had been discussed and agreed to. Feedback had been received from all companies and some questions over Salmonella testing have been resolved. Members note the final KFSI reporting targets which were tabled for informatio

The Council was advised that the Authority is on track to start trial testing later this month using a modified template based on feedback from companies. The Authority expressed its appreciation of the time and effort producers had put in to come back with their issues. It is proposed to meet with industry again in three months to evaluate the trial.

Animal welfare review in poultry processing facilities – status update

Council received an update on the animal welfare training program being developed to improve animal welfare controls in poultry processing plants. It was advised that the Authority had been provided with a nationally accredited training package developed by the Southern Queensland Institute of TAFE in early 2014 titled *Animal Welfare Officer Skill Set – Poultry Processing Plants*. The Authority had reviewed the package and provided it to representatives of the Australian Chicken Meat Federation and NSW poultry processing companies for comment and input, and responses received so far had been very positive with a few minor changes being requested. Once comments are advised back to TAFE they will commence scheduling six training courses in NSW to be funded by the Authority. It is anticipated that the training package will be available for implementation by late 2014 and the Authority will liaise with the larger processing companies in relation to dates and locations.

It was reiterated that the Authority considers it is an important initiative to have these programs in place and its funding of these programs indicates it takes these issues seriously. It was noted that this training package mirrors the generic courses provided previously with

MINTRAC (National Meat Industry Training Advisory Council) and AMIC (Australian Meat Industry Council) for the red meat industry.

Sulphur dioxide (SO₂) Compliance Policy

Members received an update on the Authority's compliance strategy in relation to the use by butchers of SO₂ in meat following survey work previously conducted by the Authority which identified that there still remain significant issues with the use of this preservative.

It was noted that out of this project the Authority has introduced three major changes to its SO₂ compliance strategy which involve reinforcement of food safety requirements, monitoring of compliance, and strengthening and targeting the enforcement response, including implementation of projects to target repeat offenders. A general circular communicating this strategy is to be issued to all licensed meat businesses. The Food Safety Program for retail meat businesses will also be updated to include requirements for SO₂ limits and its correct use.

It was indicated that enforcement action will result from the projects targeting repeat offenders and the results of this will be reported back to the Council through the compliance reports following finalisation of that process. Members also noted AMIC's strong stance on this issue. The Authority undertook to meet with AMIC's Retail Committee to hold further discussions on the strategy.

Primary Production and Processing Standard for Meat and Meat Products update

Members were informed that the Standard was approved by Ministers at the last Forum meeting in July. This will become a FSANZ standard and will come into effect July 2015 and references the Australian Standards already in place. The main issue noted is that this Standard gives more emphasis on the requirement for National Vendor Declarations (NVDs) to be filled out from farm to processing.

Primary Production and Processing Standard for Poultry Meat update

Council received an update on progress in relation to implementation of the PPS for Poultry Meat. It was noted that farm audits and micro work with processors is still on-going. Members discussed the time frame for this work to be done with all farms and it was indicated that whilst it was initially hoped to be done by the end of 2014, it may now continue into mid 2015. Once the move to a verification program is in place it is anticipated that farmers will receive a visit from the Authority at least once every three years, however there will still be a small component of farms that will be visited more frequently.

Application of Country of origin labelling (CoOL) to meat products

An update was provided on the national development of a single sign option for retailers selling raw red meat and raw poultry meat to make it easier for retailers to show country of origin on their product. It was noted that work is still ongoing to ensure that any labelling guidelines developed do not conflict with ACCC requirements and until that time the status quo will remain. The Authority will be holding discussions with ACCC and state regulators around this issue in the near future.

The next meeting of the MICC will be held in early 2015