

Summary of meeting outcomes

NSW Seafood Industry Forum

27 April 2016

The NSW Seafood Industry Forum held a meeting in Sydney on Wednesday, 27 April 2016. Specific issues considered by the Forum at its meeting are detailed below.

Food safety program compliance report (July to December 2015)

The Forum noted the food safety compliance report for the seafood industry sector during the period 1 July 2015 to 31 December 2015. During this period there had been 334 acceptable rated audits with 88% A rated, 11.4% B rated and 0.6% C rated; 44 failed audits (11% failure rate); and 158 inspections (25 unacceptable inspections). It was explained that the 11% failure rate was due to the low number of audits conducted over the six month period; this is not of concern as trending for the sector during the 12 month period is on target.

The main areas where critical defects have been raised at audit continue to be with Process control, analytical testing, and food safety program monitoring. Overall the Food Authority is pleased with the good outcome for the sector during the reporting period; there have been no consecutive failures and the vast majority of defects raised have been rectified immediately which demonstrates that effective corrective actions are being implemented by businesses.

An outline of enforcement activities in the seafood sector was also noted; currently there are no pending enforcement matters before the courts. It was noted that two warning letters were issued for labelling offences and there had been one foodborne illness outbreak during the period due to ciguatera in which three people had been affected.

Williamstown RAAF site PFOS contamination incident update

Members received an update on the contamination incident at the Williamstown RAAF base due to the previous use of fire fighting foam containing the chemicals Perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) and Perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA). The Department of Defence is conducting a Human Health Risk Assessment which will include a detailed study on levels of contamination in the area and potential risk to the local community.

It was noted that the NSW government had established an Expert Panel to assist with providing advice on handling this issue. The panel consists of experts from key agencies (NSW EPA, NSW OEH, NSW Health, NSW Food Authority, NSW DPI Fisheries, DPI Water and Biosecurity and independent subject experts). They have also commenced an extensive sampling program of commercial seafood from around the area and will commence testing of other food sources. Members were advised that further information on this can be found on the NSW EPA website: <http://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/MediaInformation/williamtown.htm> .

Recall programs for very small businesses

Members noted a paper regarding work by the Food Authority to develop a simplified generic template to assist small businesses such as wholesalers and manufacturers to have a food recall program in place. A copy of a two-page generic template developed to enable businesses to recall product effectively was tabled for information. This template is available to businesses through the Food Authority's web site.

It was noted that all trials using the template so far have worked well and over time this will be rolled out to other food safety schemes. The template has also been shared with other jurisdictions and it is expected that this will be a standard recall system across multiple states in Australia for small businesses.

Joint Fisheries Operation

The Forum received an update on Operation Trident, a joint NSW DPI Fisheries and Biosecurity & Food Safety operation which was conducted in March this year with a focus on the seafood black market. Inspections were undertaken at 15 targeted locations in the Sydney metropolitan area. The outcome of this operation was excellent, with 95% of the retailers inspected showing acceptable levels of compliance relating to product traceability and no product identification labelling issues identified. Members were advised that these joint operations will be more visible now that compliance operations are streamlined under NSW DPI and they will continue to work together on future compliance projects and joint operations to safeguard the seafood industry.

Pacific Oyster Mortality Syndrome (POMS) information for restaurants

Members received an update on the recent detection of the virus that causes Pacific Oyster Mortality Syndrome (POMS) in some Tasmanian estuaries. It was noted that in response to this outbreak in Tasmania that as of 5 February 2016, NSW implemented formal importation restrictions that prohibit the movement of live bivalves and associated oyster cultivation equipment into NSW waters. These measures are in place to minimise the risk of further spread of the POMS virus into the NSW oyster farming estuaries.

A Fact Sheet developed specifically to seek biosecurity best practice by seafood restaurants was tabled for information – this was distributed through Food Authority local council networks to restaurants in areas of NSW in which Pacific Oysters are farmed. It is also available on the NSW DPI website in both English and Chinese (simplified and traditional) at: <http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fisheries/aquaculture/info/poms>

Members were advised that the Tasmanian government is working closely with their oyster industry, developing biosecurity plans for hatcheries and discussions are continuing with other jurisdictions to consider protocols that may be able to be developed to send oyster spat back into the market.

NSW DPI has received a formal request to consider allowing Tasmanian reared hatchery spat into the POMS affected areas of Georges River and Hawkesbury River. NSW DPI is currently assessing the risk associated with this proposal and will provide further updates if that happens.

Audit and Inspection Factsheets

Factsheets prepared by the Food Authority that will be given to businesses receiving unacceptable audit or inspection outcomes were tabled for information and noted. These were developed to ensure that businesses are informed of enforcement actions that would be implemented if they fail to rectify defects and also to clearly outline next steps and answer any questions licensees may have. The Food Authority would welcome any feedback from the seafood sector on this.

Country of Origin (CoOL) Labelling legislation reforms – Australian Consumer Law

A paper was tabled outlining changes to the Country of Origin Labelling (CoOL) requirements for food together with copies of the Information Standard and Explanatory Memorandum. The new standard will commence on 1 July 2016 but stakeholders will have a two year period for compliance to 1 July 2018.

It was advised that these reforms will result in some foods needing to display a pictograph of a kangaroo and a bar chart depicting the amount of Australian content. Members discussed the various scenarios on how these requirements will affect the different types of product offered for sale in the seafood industry – whole fish, fillets on ice, fillets in transparent wrap, boxed product, crumbed product, and other marinated or seasoned product as well as imported product.

Members were advised that the Commonwealth will be launching some national style guides and businesses can seek more answers and information through the ACCC website.

Subsequent to meeting of the NSW Seafood Industry Forum:

Further consultation with the ACCC has confirmed that Australian whole gutted fish and fish fillets sold on ice will need to include the kangaroo logo and bar graph on the label peg in order to comply with the new Country of Origin Labelling Information Standard.

Further queries concerning compliance with the new Country of Origin Labelling Standard should be directed to the ACCC at:

1300 302 502 or

<http://www.accc.gov.au/contact-us/contact-the-accc/general-enquiry-form>

Ciguatera outbreak update

The Forum noted an update on new incidents of ciguatera fish poisoning (CFP) which had occurred in March and April 2016 as well as research being supported by the Food Authority into the contributing factors. The most recent incidents of CFP had been from Spanish Mackerel caught off the coast of Crowdy Head and Crescent Head, both of which were further south than any previous recorded CFP occurrence. As the Food Authority's previous education information on this issue has been focussed further north, it has now updated its notification via a state-wide press release to recreational fishers and consumers on the risks associated with consuming fish greater than 10kg. The NSW DPI Fisheries has also sent out a warning to all recreational fishers on their data base and via their website.

Members were advised by Mark Boulter, Sydney Fish Market representative, of research work about to be published which was commissioned by the University of Technology Sydney into the prevalence of ciguatera in NSW Spanish Mackerel. Taking this research and current advice from the Food Authority into account, Mr Boulter said the Sydney Fish Market (SFM) has put together a paper that will be circulated to industry on risk management options. This was tabled for information of members who were asked to provide feedback to the Sydney Fish Market.

National Seafood Industry Emergency (Incident) Response Plan

A paper was tabled by Norman Grant regarding a project identified by the Seafood Importers' Association of Australasia (SIAA) for its newly formed organisation to develop an Emergency Response Plan (ERP) for the national seafood industry. This had previously been housed in Seafood Services Australia prior to its dissolution and they would like to see this revamped.

Members noted that there is a national Food Incident Response Plan in place and that the Sydney Fish Market now has its own corporate plan. It was agreed to further investigate the potential for SIAA to work in with ERP's such as these which are already in place and avoid any duplication by industry.

Update on Shellfish evaluation

The Forum received a brief update on an evaluation currently underway of the NSW Shellfish program. The evaluation will review the implementation of the NSW Shellfish Program and will focus on ways in which to improve the efficiency of program delivery. Industry consultation will be conducted in May 2016. Further information on this will be provided to members when completed.

Communications update

Members received an update on work the Food Authority's communications team has been doing since the last meeting in relation to the seafood industry sector, including the issue of *Foodwise* at the end of February, Fact sheets and guidance documents, and the launch of a refreshed Food Authority web-site. The Food Authority would continue to welcome feedback on the new website. Of note the communications that have gone out to industry and consumer stakeholders include a run-down on social media posts and communications with consumers. Ciguatera information reached over 8,000 people on Facebook alone; this is a good indication that this information is reaching people and there was good coverage in the media as well.

The next meeting of the NSW Seafood Industry Forum will be held on 19 October 2016.