

Summary of meeting outcomes

Egg Industry Consultative Committee

8 August 2018

The Egg Industry Consultative Committee (EICC) held a meeting in Sydney on Wednesday 8 August 2018. Specific issues considered by the Committee at its meeting are detailed below.

Attendees

Egg Industry Consultative Committee: Bede Burke (NSW Farmers' Association), Raymond Chia (Australian Eggs), Angela Griffin (Egg Farmers Australia), Peter Matuszny (Free range egg producers' representative, Manning Valley Free Range Eggs), Rowan McMonnies (Australian Eggs), Paul Pace (large egg processors' representative, Pace Farm).

NSW DPI – Biosecurity & Food Safety: Lisa Szabo - Chair (Group Director Food Safety & CEO NSW Food Authority), Emily Staniforth (Director Customer Service & Engagement), Mark Mackie (Manager, Audit Systems & Verification), Craig Shadbolt (Manager Food Incident Response & Complaints), David Cusack (Manager, Food Standards & Programs), Amanda Black (Senior Veterinary Officer, Animal biosecurity & welfare), Jenna Fraser (Veterinary Officer, Animal biosecurity & welfare), Margaret Figueroa (Secretariat).

Apologies: John Dunn (Egg Farmers Australia), Annabel Johnson (NSW Farmers' Association), Franko Pirovic (large egg producers' representative, Pirovic Enterprises), Bruce Christie (Deputy Director General, Biosecurity & Food Safety), Peter Day (Director Biosecurity & Food Safety Compliance), Sarah Britton (NSW Chief Veterinary Officer and Group Director Animal Biosecurity), Geneveive Bonello (Manager, Stakeholder Engagement & Communications), Ryoko Uchida (Senior Industry Analyst, International Engagement).

Industry updates

Members provided updates on key and emerging issues in their respective industry sectors. They were unanimous in expressing their concerns at the effects on the industry, both present and long term, from the current drought situation in NSW and agreed that this needs to be monitored closely.

Food safety program compliance report

The Committee noted a report on egg industry compliance activities between 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018. During this reporting period 175 audits and 82 inspections were carried out with 12 failed audits and 6 failed inspections. Enforcement actions included the issue of 10 improvement notices, three penalty notices and one warning letter. There were no foodborne illness investigations conducted in this sector during the period.

Detailed compliance information in the report showed that the audit compliance rate for the egg sector has remained steady and is currently at 94%, with a 4% increase in egg statistics over the last three years which is an excellent result. Critical defects remain standard across all industry sectors, with the areas of Process Control, Construction and Hygiene & Sanitation being the main ones in which defects are found. Overall it has been a good year with positive results for the sector.

Biosecurity & Food Safety Compliance Regulatory Priorities 2018-2019

A paper was tabled for information on the Regulatory Priorities for the Department's Biosecurity & Food Safety (BFS) Compliance team during the 2018-2019 period. These priorities are reviewed annually and are determined in consultation with key industry and community stakeholders. The Critical Core Functions for the team include:

- Audit, inspection and certification services to verify a safe and secure food supply, the welfare of exhibited and research animals and to maintain and provide access to markets for NSW primary producers;
- Investigation of unlicensed/unregistered operations and complaints;
- Responding to and investigating foodborne illness outbreaks and pest and disease issues and assisting in emergency management operations as necessary.

Other priorities under the areas of biosecurity, food safety, system enhancement and performance enhancement were noted by members.

Update on NSW DPI Antimicrobial Risk Assessment

Members received an update on the NSW antimicrobial resistance (AMR) policy being developed by the NSW government (DPI and Local Land Services). This policy will outline the role of the NSW Government in the use of antimicrobials in animals that create AMR threats to human and animal health and the environment in NSW.

Following a comprehensive risk assessment, the draft policy was sent out for industry consultation with key stakeholders. Feedback has already been received from the Australian Chicken Meat Federation, Australian Eggs, Dairy Australia, Meat and Livestock Australia, Australian Lot Feeders' Association, and the office of the Australian Chief Veterinary Officer. The main message coming back through the consultation is that the NSW policy be consistent with the national strategy.

The Department will take on board the comments received and will make sure the policy is aligned with the national policy. Following the consultation process the next step is for the policy to go to the Animal Health Committee for review and comments from other jurisdictions. When finalised the policy will be up-loaded onto the Department's website.

National Foodborne Illness Reduction Strategy 2018-2021 Update

The Committee noted an update on a sub-project under the *National Foodborne Illness Reduction Strategy* to develop an understanding of the food safety culture of retail businesses that serve raw egg foods. The project is being run through South Australia Health with input from several other government stakeholders, including NSW DPI, and will be used as a case study to better understand the drivers for improving the food safety culture in the retail sector and reduce the frequency of outbreaks linked to raw egg foods. The project's Draft Terms of Reference and a Stakeholder Engagement Plan were reviewed at a meeting of the Implementation Sub-Committee for Food Regulation in July and it is anticipated the project will run for around 18 months.

In terms of national outbreaks, it was noted that there continues to be a significant decrease in salmonellosis outbreaks linked to raw egg foods in NSW, with the last outbreak occurring in January 2017. This is the lowest rate in the last ten years and follows the introduction of additional measures around raw egg use at retail level, with specific training of all Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) in NSW and dedicated training modules in the NSW Food Safety Supervisor program. NSW Health salmonellosis figures from January 2014 to July 2018 were tabled, indicating that NSW has achieved its 30% foodborne salmonellosis reduction target under the NSW Food Safety Strategy 2015-2021. The Department will be sharing the learnings from this work nationally across other jurisdictions.

Consistency of animal welfare, food safety and biosecurity outcomes

A paper was tabled by Australian Eggs to prompt discussion around the work being done by their organisation, Egg Farmers of Australia and the NSW Food Authority to improve the performance of the egg industry, to ensure that there is consistency and that all organisations

are working together in achieving their required animal welfare, food safety and biosecurity outcomes.

Concerns had been raised by Australian Egg members that many small operators who are new to the industry (particularly small pop-up egg sellers) are not participating in the Australian Eggs quality assurance scheme (ESA) and are also not required to be licensed by the Food Authority as they produce less than 100 dozen eggs per week. This increases the risk of significant food safety incidents from the sale of eggs through this sector. There was discussion on the need to generate incentives to stop customers from buying from small pop-up egg sellers and encourage them to only purchase from people meeting the required standards. It was agreed that further consideration needs to be given on how to improve consumer knowledge and understanding that drives their choices.

It was noted that the BFS Compliance team is looking at introducing programs to identify good performers with consistently high audit results which will also enable them to increase their focus on high risk operations. Members also discussed ways in which the Department can support the industry through its targeted messages and training modules.

Australian Eggs would welcome any further input on these issues.

Duck and Quail Egg Stamping Exemption

An information paper was tabled on a proposal to provide an egg stamping exemption for duck and quail eggs only and to leave them with the existing provisions in the Code concerning egg labelling. This came about following a review in 2016 by the Food Authority which identified disproportionately higher costs for stamping duck and quail eggs compared to hen eggs. Further consultation with the industry identified that reliable traceability systems are in place due to the small number of licensees supplying these eggs; and other factors such as the preserving process for duck eggs, and size, colour and fragility of quail eggs contribute to the difficulties of stamping. Drafting instructions are underway for the proposed amendments to the Food Regulation 2015. Feedback from egg producer and processor members of the committee questioning the discrepancies which had been identified in costs of stamping these eggs and drawing attention to the ready accessibility to the industry of inexpensive printing equipment and technology was noted.

Discussion on separate licence permission for spent hens

Following concerns raised on this issue at the previous meeting, members were advised that a project will be conducted in the next twelve months as part of the BFS Compliance Regulatory Priorities to find out who is producing spent hens for slaughter. These operators will have another condition put on their licence to have a traceability system in place.

Update of the Food Safety Schemes Manual

Members noted a paper advising that the NSW Food Authority's Food Safety Schemes Manual has recently been reviewed to ensure that all requirements of Food Regulation 2015 are included and to modernise the format for easier reading. The update will not include any changes affecting the Egg Industry Food Safety Scheme.

Communications update

The Committee received an update on current issues across Biosecurity & Food Safety, including:

- Feedback from consultation on the *Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Poultry* has been received and there is a report on this on the NSW DPI website. A drafting group is currently considering submissions received and these will be taken into consideration when finalising the standards.

- The *NSW Animal Welfare Action Plan* was released in May 2018. Further information on this is available on the DPI web-site.

It was advised that Australian Eggs is conducting a research program through the CSIRO to examine the relationship between the egg industry and the Australian community. The community survey is going live during August and will assist in gaining a better understanding of community views, attitudes and understanding of the egg industry. Australian Eggs offered to share this model with the Department's communications team.

Biosecurity update

It was advised that the DPI has recently announced the creation of a new Chief Animal Welfare Officer to separate the policy and standards work from the compliance and licensing activities which sit under the BFS Compliance team. Members indicated they would like to invite the new Chief Animal Welfare Officer to attend a future meeting of the Committee.

The next meeting of the Egg Industry Consultative Committee will be held in 2019 – date to be advised.