

Summary of meeting outcomes

Egg Industry Consultative Committee

7 March 2017

The Egg Industry Consultative Committee (EICC) held a meeting in Sydney on Tuesday 7 March 2017. Specific issues considered by the Committee at its meeting are detailed below.

Attendees

Egg Industry Consultative Committee: Bede Burke (NSW Farmers' Association), Rowan McMonnies & Raymond Chia (Australian Egg Corporation Ltd), Peter Matusznyi (Free range egg producers' representative, Manning Valley Free Range Eggs). **Apologies:** John Dunn (Egg Farmers Australia), Paul Pace (large egg processors' representative, Pace Farm), Franko Pirovic (large egg producers' representative, Pirovic Enterprises), Amanda Lee (NSW DPI – Biosecurity & Food Safety representative).

NSW DPI – Biosecurity & Food Safety: Lisa Szabo, Chair (Group Director Food Safety & CEO NSW Food Authority), Peter Day (Director Biosecurity & Food Safety Compliance), Juliet Corish (A/Group Director Animal Biosecurity & Welfare & A/Chief Veterinary Officer), Julia Harvey (Director Stakeholder Engagement & Customer Service), Ryoko Uchida (Senior Industry Analyst, International Engagement), Mark Mackie (Manager, Audit Systems & Verification), Craig Shadbolt (Manager, Food Incident Response & Complaints), Margaret Figueroa (Secretariat). **Apologies:** Bruce Christie (Deputy Director General, Biosecurity & Food Safety), Christine Middlemiss (Group Director Animal Biosecurity & Welfare & Chief Veterinary Officer), David Cusack (Manager, Strategic Policy & Projects), Geneveive Bonello (Manager, Stakeholder Engagement & Communications).

Food safety program compliance report

The Committee noted a report on food safety compliance in the egg industry sector for the six-month period 1 July 2016 to 31 December 2016. This report has been reformatted with the intent of providing a snapshot and basic overview of compliance during the reporting period. The results for this six-month period mainly focused on industry compliance rates; these have achieved the target of 95% compliance which is very good. During the period 107 audits and 38 inspections were conducted (with 2 failed audits), 4 food-borne illness investigations were carried out; and 3 Prohibition Orders, 4 Improvement Notices, 6 Penalty Notices and 14 Critical corrective actions requests (CARs) were issued. The low level of enforcement actions highlights the very high level of compliance. The Prohibition Orders issued related directly to food borne illness investigations conducted by the Food Incident Response & Complaints Unit. From the licence sector, there has also been a high level of compliance which is very pleasing. It was noted that the top three areas where auditors are raising defects at audit are within construction, hygiene & sanitation, and process control.

In addition, it was noted that over 600 egg stamps have been issued since the introduction of egg stamping in November 2014.

Overall the report is very positive, with no areas of concern. The next report will be for a 12-month period and will contain more specific information and detail.

Foodborne illness update

Members received a presentation giving an update on *Salmonella* and *Salmonella* Typhimurium related illnesses in NSW since the introduction of a Food Safety Strategy in March 2015 with a reduction target of 30% by 2021. It was noted that there had been a reduction in *Salmonella* Typhimurium outbreaks in January 2017 which is the first decrease

for the New Year reporting period since 2012. 2016 had been a record year for cases which was influenced by higher temperatures and fresh produce outbreaks as well. This reduction was attributed to diligent work with Councils and Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) in working with businesses to adopt Raw Egg Guidelines; other contributing factors were better retail sanitation, cleaning, skills and knowledge; mandated training for Food Safety Supervisors on raw egg use, and increased vaccination rates in egg layer flocks, joint NSW DPI/Local Government compliance operations and ongoing work with the AECL to conduct industry education programs and research.

Further work will be undertaken with local councils to monitor the use of raw egg foods at the retail level, and NSW DPI will be collaborating with the AECL on finalisation of its *Salmonella Incidence Response Plan* to assist layer farms in management of *Salmonella* detections.

Members noted the report and agreed that the drop in *Salmonella* rates is a good outcome.

National Antimicrobial Resistance Strategy update

The Committee received an update on the national strategy around reducing the prevalence of antimicrobial resistance. As part of that the Commonwealth is looking at improved surveillance for the food supply chain, and one of the areas identified was higher resistance to antibiotics coming in from overseas. They are planning on funding a study in co-operation with food regulators into the existing prevalence of AMR isolates being picked up in the last few years. These will be typed and compared to overseas records. If it can be demonstrated that Australia has lower levels of resistance than other countries this will be a driver for export as well.

It was confirmed that a contract had been signed by the Commonwealth and that AECL have been involved in development of this. They see this as a process with great opportunity for the egg industry which is a relatively low user of antimicrobials both nationally and internationally compared to other industries and they are looking at taking a leadership role to frame consideration of this matter. It was advised that Dr Peter Scott (Consultant to the egg and poultry industry) will be speaking at a Forum on this issue in May and has written an article for the AECL newsletter *Eggstra*.

Review of Egg Stamping Implementation in NSW

Lisa Szabo tabled an information paper regarding a review conducted by the Food Authority in 2016 on the implementation of egg stamping introduced in November 2014 in NSW. The report on this review was made public in December 2016 and is available on the Food Authority's website at:

http://www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/Documents/industry/egg_stamping_review.pdf

The report showed that egg stamping has been adopted well by industry who are continuing to benefit from it in terms of product traceability and a lower than anticipated overall cost. The Food Authority thanked EICC members and the NSW egg producers who contributed to this review.

Following a question in relation to egg stamping machine breakdowns, it was explained that in NSW the Food Authority has a system in place for equipment failures. In these instances, a licensee must complete a *Notification of Stamping Equipment Failure* form and submit it to the Food Authority within 24 hours. A resumption date is then negotiated and the licensee will receive a letter from the Food Authority that can be shown to customers explaining why the eggs are not stamped and that other traceability systems are in place. If necessary, an extension can be granted to the resumption date. Where licensees notify of equipment failures on multiple occasions, steps are taken to encourage them to invest in new machinery. This system has been highly successful.

Salmonella Accreditation programs

The Committee noted information papers on joint NSW/VIC *Salmonella* Enteritidis and *Salmonella* Pullorum monitoring and accreditation programs (SEMAP and SPMAP) which are available to commercial egg producers and poultry producers in NSW and Victoria. Links to the guidelines were provided.

The value of these sorts of accreditation programs was emphasised as they demonstrate how critical biosecurity and food safety measures are right through to the point of sale, and they can offer opportunities in terms of disease management practices and freedom to maintain market access. Another benefit is the surveillance data they provide to industry.

Further advice will be provided to members following a question raised as to whether *Salmonella* Pullorum remains a common importing country certification requirement and, if so, for which countries and is this supported by current prevalence data.

Emerging Rotavirus Pigeon Disease update

The Committee noted a paper tabled for information following several reports over the last 12 months about kept pigeons (racing and fancy) with the rotavirus disease, resulting in high levels of mortalities. There is currently no vaccine for this virus which poses a biosecurity risk for commercial poultry growers. The NSW DPI has made a number of recommendations to minimise the risk of possibility of cross infection, including avoiding mixing pigeons from unaffected and affected lofts, and maintaining strict biosecurity measures.

Cracked and dirty eggs tolerances

A paper was tabled by the AECL for discussion around tolerances for cracked and dirty eggs. This has risen following concerns at the impracticality of the zero-tolerance approach adopted by some food safety regulators. The AECL is hoping to engage with all State/Territory jurisdictions to come up with a common approach, and asked for NSW's views on the way they manage this issue.

The approach adopted by the Food Authority in dealing with this in NSW was outlined, and it was explained that there are two sides to the way this is managed. Firstly, during the formal audit process the Food Authority's auditors look at a licensee's systems to make sure they are working by picking up cracked and dirty eggs; the main focus is to see if there is any gross contamination coming out of the plant. The other side of managing this is through complaints coming in from regulators or local councils. One complaint over a cracked or dirty egg will be followed up at the next audit if it is possible that the breakage or contamination could have occurred in transit or in a store. If there are multiple complaints, or one complaint with sufficient evidence (such as large quantities of breakages or contamination), that will be investigated by going back to the farm or grader to look at their systems. Overall management is on a case by case basis and by looking at audit history.

Another issue raised by the AECL is the need for a common basis in assessing what is a cracked egg. In NSW licensees are responsible for having crack detection systems in place, but once eggs leave a property they have no further control. The Food Authority has been working with some of the larger retailers to ensure a common-sense approach to this issue.

The AECL representatives noted the approach being taken by the Food Authority and the success they have had.

Poultry Animal Welfare Standards & Guidelines Process

The AECL tabled a paper regarding the process currently underway to develop the Poultry Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines. A draft Regulatory Impact Statement, which is presently under consideration by the Office of Best Practice Regulation (OBPR) and the Animal Welfare Task Group (AWTG), is expected to go out for public consultation in April.

The AECL was of the view that the position arrived at to date harnessed the evidence of global, independent scientific reviews which is robust and forms the most cost efficient, balanced and accurate basis on which to proceed with the Standards and Guidelines process. The AECL is aware that some groups are taking a different stance and are seeking an independent scientific review as part of the process. The AECL are concerned this might lead to two apparent “landing positions” on the available science.

The concerns expressed by the AECL on behalf of industry were noted and will be conveyed to the NSW representative on the Animal Welfare Task Group.

Communications update

The Committee received an update on work the Food Authority’s communications team has been doing since the last meeting in relation to the egg industry sector including social media posts, *Foodwise*, industry reports and guidelines, and translations on the web site of food safety guidelines for the preparation of raw egg products. Collateral material recently developed with Anaphylaxis Australia was circulated for information.

Members were encouraged to contact the Food Authority with any issues relating to egg handling and safety they would like to see included in *Foodwise* or other communications.

Biosecurity legislation program update

The Committee noted an update on the current remake of the Biosecurity Regulation being conducted by the Department. The two and a half month consultation period on the Regulatory Impact Statement and draft Regulations was completed on 29 January 2017 and 74 submissions were received. Input from those submissions is currently being developed into a summary report. Training programs for authorised officers are also under development and will include on-line and face to face training in different locations around the State.

Members were advised that no specific issues relating to the egg industry were raised in the submissions received and there will not be much change in requirements for production systems in this sector as it already has biosecurity measures in place.

NSW DPI International Engagement Unit

Ryoko Uchida, Senior Industry Analyst with the Department’s International Engagement Unit, gave a brief outline of the Unit’s role in assisting industry with international agribusiness trade and investment opportunities. On the back of avian influenza that has spread globally over the past several months, specific temporary openings for the egg sector in South Korea were discussed. Ms Uchida said the Unit would be happy to assist members and support their industry with any issues of this nature.

The next meeting of the Egg Industry Consultative Committee will be held on Wednesday 9 August 2017.