

Summary of meeting outcomes

NSW Seafood Industry Forum

2 May 2017

The NSW Seafood Industry Forum held a meeting in Sydney on Tuesday, 2 May 2017. Specific issues considered by the Forum at its meeting are detailed below.

Attendees

NSW Seafood Industry Forum members: Patricia Beatty (Professional Fishermen's Association Inc), Mark Boulter (Safe Sustainable Seafood), Ross Fidden (Commercial Fishermen's Co-operative Ltd), Norman Grant (Seafood Importers' Association of Australasia Inc), Robert McCormack (NSW Aquaculture Association Inc), Anthony Mercer (De Costi Seafoods), Erik Poole (Sydney Fish Market Pty Ltd), Kerry Strangas (Master Fish Merchants Association of Australia), Melissa Walker (NSW DPI Biosecurity & Food Safety), Jeffrey Go (NSW DPI Biosecurity & Food Safety).

NSW DPI – Biosecurity & Food Safety: Lisa Szabo, Chair (Group Director Food Safety & CEO NSW Food Authority), Peter Day (Director Biosecurity & Food Safety Compliance), Julia Harvey (Director Stakeholder Engagement & Customer Service), Helen Chen (Senior Project Officer, Mission & Delegation, International Engagement), Craig Shadbolt (Manager, Food Incident Response & Complaints), David Cusack (Manager, Strategic Policy & Projects), Margaret Figueroa (Secretariat). **Apologies:** Bruce Christie (Deputy Director General, Biosecurity & Food Safety), Mark Mackie (Manager, Audit Systems & Verification), Geneveive Bonello (Manager, Stakeholder Engagement & Communications).

Food safety program compliance report

The Forum noted the food safety compliance report for the seafood industry sector during the period 1 July 2016 to 31 December 2016. This reformatted report gives a snapshot of current numbers of licensed facilities in NSW in terms of seafood processors, oyster harvesters and fishing vessels.

It was noted that in NSW there is a food industry compliance target of 95% in all food sectors. Currently the seafood industry is running at 94.6% which is an improvement on previous results. During the period 346 audits were conducted with 27 failed audits, and 357 inspections were conducted with 11 inspection failures. Results from the oyster industry are affecting these levels following a period of adjustment to a new Shellfish Audit Model that was introduced for auditing estuaries. The DPI has been working closely with oyster farmers in the last 8 months to turn this around and there is now positive feedback from that sector on this new program.

The compliance rate for seafood processors has increased over the last number of years by around 7%, which is a slight improvement overall. Oyster farmers are now trending upwards in terms of their compliance as well.

The top three audit items with higher observed levels of critical issues during this reporting period were within process control (33%), analytical testing (23%) and food safety program (19%). The overall compliance rate for the sector is very good. The introduction of an Audit Notification letter to licensees in October 2016 is having an impact on the compliance level as licensees are reviewing their documents and ensuring they are audit ready.

White Spot update

Members received an update following the detection of White Spot in prawn farms in south east Queensland on the Logan River, and through subsequent wild surveillance in a small proportion of wild prawns sampled both in Logan River and in north Moreton Bay. This is a contagious viral disease of crustaceans but poses no risk to human health. The outbreak is being managed by the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries.

There is currently no evidence of White Spot in NSW, however to help minimise the risk of its spread, the NSW DPI has established an importation order that places restrictions on the importation into NSW of any uncooked decapod crustaceans (such as prawns, crabs, yabbies, Moreton Bay bugs and lobsters) or polychaete worms (marine bait worms) from a designated area encompassing all affected areas in south east Queensland. In addition, all fittings that have been used to catch decapod crustaceans or polychaete worms within the closed area are prohibited from entry into NSW unless they have been thoroughly cleaned and disinfected before being used in NSW waters.

Members discussed surveillance work underway in NSW involving testing of samples from each of the three active prawn farms in production, all of which have tested negative to White Spot, which was a good outcome for that program. There will be further testing of prawns captured from the wild through an active surveillance program. Nine fishing zones in NSW will be represented through this sampling covering ocean haul and estuary trawl zones in the northern parts of the State. These zones encompass the area for which NSW decapods are not currently permitted into Western Australia, as a result of precautionary movement controls being established for some northern NSW fisheries; this surveillance program will provide NSW with some data to provide assurance to its interstate trading partners.

Members were advised that communication activities have been ongoing and evolving for the DPI led by its Communications team. This includes signage around boat ramps and jetties, and messages to commercial and recreational fishers reminding them that prawns meant for human consumption should not be used as bait. The DPI has developed a weekly situation report to manage what is happening and provide updates to stakeholders. Further opportunity will be provided following commencement of the *Biosecurity Act 2015* on 1 July 2017 to educate people and communities throughout NSW on their general biosecurity duty.

The following issues were raised by industry as areas of concern:

- A strong message was conveyed about perceived differences in testing methods and interpretation of results between domestic and Commonwealth monitoring programs. Further information will be provided to members on this.
- Members discussed the surveillance program in NSW and sought more information on what was proposed, particularly the reasons for focusing on the north of the state rather than a statewide operation.
- Concerns were expressed over the impact on international trade and export market access since this recent detection of White Spot was confirmed in Queensland. The DPI will formally raise these concerns with the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture and Water Resources.
- The Forum also sought clarification on decontamination messages due to conflicting messages between jurisdictions.

Fishing vessel inspections

Members noted an update on the inspection program currently underway of fishing vessels to ensure licensed vessels receive inspections at the required frequency. The DPI is working closely with individual fishers and appreciates the support of the Co-operatives in helping organise inspections. There has been an outstanding compliance rate with fishers, with 99% of inspections resulting in acceptable results. The DPI Compliance team is open to negotiating schedules to suit fishers' needs.

Ciguatera

Forum members were updated on work currently underway to develop a "Ciguatera Poisoning" fact sheet for publication on the Food Authority website. A draft of this fact sheet will be circulated to members for feedback prior to its publication.

It was noted that there have been no Ciguatera outbreaks this year which could be attributed to people becoming more aware of the risks associated with consumption of large size fish.

Seafood welfare update

Members noted an update on a seafood welfare issue that had arisen following the prosecution of a company under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act* for an act of cruelty in terms of how they were dealing with lobsters. Members were reminded that there is a guideline on humane harvesting of fish and crustaceans on the DPI's website, and the National Aquaculture Council Aquatic Animal Welfare Guidelines contain similar recommendations. This issue highlights the need for processors and retailers to ensure they are aware of the guidelines and abide by them.

Imported Food Notice relating to carbon monoxide treatment of fish

Members noted a paper advising that the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture and Water Resources has put out an Imported Food Notice to Seafood Importers and Processors around use of carbon monoxide. This paper outlines advice from the Commonwealth government that there are requirements importers should follow in terms of sourcing their product from overseas. Importers are responsible to ensure it is compliant with the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code and has not been treated with carbon monoxide. There could be labelling implications if people are not declaring smoked or non-smoked product as this could be breach of consumer law.

Codex review of limits of methylmercury in fish

A Codex Committee discussion paper on maximum levels for methylmercury in fish was tabled for information. This issue was flagged as it could have major impacts on seafood being sold in Australia in terms of species listed as having potential health concerns.

Biosecurity legislation update

Members noted an update on progress in relation to implementation of the new *Biosecurity Act 2015* legislation which will come into effect from 1 July 2017. Face to face and on-line training programs for around 500 authorised officers across the State are currently being conducted and a community education program will be rolled out once the Act is in place.

Williamstown

Members noted concerns raised by the Professional Fishermen's Association representative on the on-going effects to the fishing industry in the Hunter region of the Williamstown contamination issue and consequent recommended daily intake guidelines to consumers which is affecting local purchases of seafood.

The next meeting of the NSW Seafood Industry Forum will be held on Tuesday, 17 October 2017.