

# NSW Seafood Industry Forum

Wednesday 23 September 2015

## Summary of meeting outcomes

The NSW Seafood Industry Forum (SIF) held a meeting in Sydney on Wednesday, 23 September 2015. Specific issues considered by the Forum at its meeting are detailed below.

### **Project work on black marketing of product in the seafood industry**

The Food Authority gave a brief update on its scheduled operations throughout the year targeting the black marketing sale of seafood, including its annual Operation Trident which looks at black marketing in the oyster industry. The Food Authority responds to any complaints regarding this and works closely with NSW Fisheries and NSW Police.

### **NSW Food Authority food safety program compliance report**

The seafood industry sector compliance report for the period 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2015 was presented for information of members. Activities undertaken during this period were noted, which included 397 acceptable rated audits with only 23 failed audits, and 1,438 inspections with only 18 unacceptable inspections. This indicated a high compliance rate of around 95% which is a very good result for the seafood sector.

The Food Authority will be rolling out a program in the next six months looking at fishing vessels. These inspections will tie in with the implementation of training programs in the co-operatives; before this occurs there will be a mail out to every licensee. The Food Authority will provide members with a full breakdown on the outcomes of the operation when it is completed.

Members noted graphs presenting comparative compliance rate trends and a breakdown of audit data analysis across the 2012-2015 three year period showing where corrective action requests (CARs) are being issued. The top three audit items where critical issues are being observed are in the areas of process control (failure to complete paperwork and monitoring records), analytical testing, and construction and maintenance issues. With the implementation of the Byte auditing system, the Food Authority's auditors are seeing issues being corrected a lot more quickly.

Enforcement activities in the seafood sector for the reporting period were noted, including the issue of 28 improvement notices, 4 penalty notices, 3 warning letters and a seizure of live pipis harvested from a closed beach. The Food Authority will continue to target issues such as temperature control for large fish in its fact sheets for seafood transport vehicles operators to reduce the incidence of foodborne illness in the sector.

It was noted that it is an overall positive report with high compliance rates and no significant trends being identified. At the next meeting the Food Authority will be able to provide three-yearly analysis of data.

### **Williamstown RAAF base contamination update**

Members received an update on the recent contamination issue at Williamstown RAAF base. The NSW government had become aware of this issue after being informed by the Department of Defence that the southern point of the RAAF runway at Williamstown has been found to be contaminated with chemical residues from fire fighting foams previously used at the base. These foams contain compounds that persist in the environment, accumulate in the food chain and have the potential to impact human health.

Work being conducted by all the agencies involved to determine the extent and significance of this issue to human health, water supplies and the food chain was outlined. As a precautionary measure the Food Authority and NSW Fisheries have closed the affected areas in Fullerton Cove and Upper Tilligerry Creek from commercial and recreational fishing and oyster harvesting until more testing is done. They also have a plan in place in which samples of fish and oysters are being taken from these

areas. Testing is also being conducted by relevant agencies on water quality, particularly as there are a lot of hobby farms in the region. Residents have been advised to avoid drinking bore water and eating eggs and poultry meat from chickens that have been drinking bore water, as the compounds in the chemicals are known to attach themselves to protein matter.

It was noted that the Food Authority's main concern in this issue is the safety of seafood. The Food Authority has been involved in public consultation with the local community, industry and other government agencies led by the Environmental Protection Authority. The State government has convened an Expert Panel chaired by the Chief Scientist to analyse test results. It is hoped that testing will clear the sites involved over time but until these results come back the Food Authority is unable to make a determination on the length of time for the closure. The Food Authority will keep members informed of developments.

#### **Sydney Harbour remediation project**

Members were advised that the Food Authority had been invited to a meeting with the Roads and Maritime Services (RMS) who have responsibility for the harbour and for remediating the Homebush area. The purpose of the meeting was to consult with people to look at the best remediation access and the RMS have engaged with the relevant agencies around this work. It was stressed that there is no intention to revisit the current fishing advice in the area and the RMS are working on a communications strategy to industry. The Forum will be kept updated on this issue.

#### **Country of Origin labelling (CoOL) and fish name compliance project update**

Following a request at the previous Forum meeting, a breakdown on details of premises issued with warning letters during the Food Authority's country of origin labelling and fish name compliance project at the end of 2014 was tabled. The information indicated that the project was state-wide. All businesses that were issued with letters of warning will receive follow up visits from the Food Authority and members will be kept informed of the outcomes.

#### **National CoOL update**

The Forum received an update on the Federal government's commitment to change the Country of Origin labelling scheme to clearly identify the country from which packed and processed foods come. This will be a simpler approach with a bar on the back of the box which will indicate a percentage figure of Australian product in the box versus imported. This process is still evolving and will impact anyone who puts food into a package. The main change is that CoOL requirements will move from the Food Standards Code to the Department of Fair Trading from next year.

#### **Update on staged repeal of *Food Regulation 2010***

Members received an update on the staged repeal of the *Food Regulation 2010* which comes up for review every five years. Changes impacting on the seafood industry include the removal of the licence for live catch aquaculture (however aquaculture businesses that also process fish for human consumption will still be required to hold a licence). A recommendation to repeal the requirement for spat businesses to be licensed will not be included in the proposed Regulation following concerns raised by industry during the public consultation period and by the NSW Shellfish Committee. It is expected the new Regulation will come into effect by the end of October 2015.

#### **Seafood Food Safety Scheme Evaluation (Shellfish)**

The Forum noted a paper on the proposed evaluation of the NSW Shellfish Program due for completion by June 2016. The paper outlined its purpose, scope, consultation plan with stakeholders, methodology and timing. The evaluation is being conducted to review the effectiveness of the program and determine if there are areas for improvement. Key industry stakeholders will be contacted as part of the consultation process.

The NSW Seafood Industry Forum will have a vital role in talking to people about the evaluation over the next twelve months. Mark Boulter said as chair of the NSW Shellfish Committee they are looking forward to the review. Members noted that Sydney Fish Market and the Professional Fishermen's Association were not listed as key stakeholders and asked that they be included in the consultation plan. The Food Authority will keep members informed on progress of the evaluation.

#### **Amendment to NSW Seafood Industry Forum Charter and Procedural Guidelines**

An amendment to the Forum's *Charter and Procedural Guidelines* was tabled for information and was noted.

This had been done to provide greater clarity to members on criteria for proposing alternate delegates to attend meetings as proxies.

#### **Year in review – NSW seafood safety sector**

The Committee noted a report entitled *A year in review – NSW seafood safety sector* which was tabled for

information. The paper captures a summary of work done by the Food Authority in the last 12 months with particular emphasis on activities and achievements in the seafood sector during that period. This information will inform the Food Authority's annual report to be published by the end of November 2015.

#### **Communications update**

The Forum noted a paper providing 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 an article in *Foodwise* on country of origin and fish name compliance, the document provided to members on *A Year in review – NSW seafood safety sector*, social media on sponsorship of Seafood Excellence Awards, and sponsorship of Best Supplier (NSW) award at the Seafood Excellence Awards. Members requested an article on the definition of the term "local" be included in the next edition of *Foodwise*.

#### **National Shellfish Committee**

Members received an update on discussions at the National Shellfish Committee meeting in September on traceability requirements of Bivalve molluscs at retail.

*The next meeting of the NSW Seafood Industry Forum will be held in the first half of 2016 – date to be advised.*