

NSW Seafood Industry Forum

Wednesday 29 April 2015

Summary of meeting outcomes

The NSW Seafood Industry Forum (SIF) held a meeting in Sydney on Wednesday, 29 April 2015. Specific issues considered by the Forum at its meeting are detailed below.

Pipi testing program

Members noted a paper which had been provided in response to a request from the Professional Fishermen's Association Inc. (PFA) seeking clarification on issues relating to the pipi testing program. It was acknowledged that a lot of work has been done over the years in trying to recognise the size and the scope of the industry and complexity of the program and how it is organised from a point of view of trying to reduce costs. The PFA thanked the NSW Food Authority (the Food Authority) for the information provided and advised they will be organising a pipi workshop in a couple of months' time in which commercial fishers, recreational fishers, and NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) Fisheries are attending. The Food Authority will contact Fisheries to see if there is benefit in it also being involved.

Ciguatera project

Following concerns raised at the last meeting that the Food Authority's work on the ciguatera project is not duplicated with FDRC, a paper was tabled outlining the current status of research in which the Food Authority is participating on this issue, including work with the University of Technology Sydney and some estuary projects. The paper was noted and members indicated their appreciation for the information provided.

NSW Food Authority food safety program compliance report

The Forum noted the seafood industry compliance report for the period 1 July 2014 to 31 December 2014. During this period there were 158 acceptable rated audits out of which there were only 9 failed audits, indicating that the seafood industry sector has maintained a high compliance rate of around 94%.

Audit data analysis presented showed that during the period the main audit items for which Corrective Action Requests (CAR's) had been issued were for process control (28%), including failure to complete monitoring records and to identify cross contamination risks; analytical testing (22%); and construction and maintenance (19%). These areas will be targeted for on-going attention at audits and with follow-up advice from the Food Authority to assist licensees in understanding their requirements.

Members discussed problems that arise from the deterioration of ageing infrastructure in food businesses particularly where there is not available funding for improvements or investment in new premises.

Overall the Food Authority is satisfied that there is a high compliance rate in the seafood sector.

Microbiological verification and surveillance program report

Members noted a report on the Food Authority's microbiological verification and surveillance program for the period July 2009 to June 2014, including key findings for the seafood industry, which was tabled for information.

NSW Food Authority complaints handling procedure

A report giving an overview of the Food Authority's procedures for handling of complaints was tabled for information, following a question raised on this issue at the previous meeting. All complaints received by the Food Authority are logged into a data base, categorised and triaged for action to appropriate teams in the Compliance, Enforcement and Investigation Branch and closed out within a prescribed time period. Feedback is always given to the complainant once a complaint is closed out. The Food Authority also monitors this data base for trend analysis through a number of reporting

mechanisms it has in place. The Food Authority reiterated the importance of receiving correct and detailed information from complainants to assist with follow up activities.

Country of origin labelling (CoOL) and fish name compliance project

A report was tabled for information on a compliance project/survey conducted last year between September and November which focussed on inspecting 152 seafood businesses that displayed unpackaged seafood for retail sale to check for compliance with CoOL requirements and correct naming of seafood. The survey showed there has been substantial improvement with compliance in the last couple of years with the bulk of retailers adequately labelling. There were still some non-compliance issues in terms of technical wording of product (such as "local" product) and only one area where a product substitution was found. Members noted the overall positive outcome of this survey.

Histamine in tuna

Forum members noted a report on two recent outbreaks of seafood histamine (scombrotoxin) poisoning in NSW which had been linked to imported tuna sold from two different retail venues in Sydney. Both outbreaks had been investigated and dealt with promptly and the companies concerned had withdrawn the product from sale. In both instances no food handling issues had been implicated and the Food Authority has been unable to determine where the histamine build up occurred.

Members were advised that the Commonwealth Department of Industry is conducting regional consultation session with industry on food country of origin labelling and information on this is available on their web-site www.industry.gov.au/cool

Health star rating for seafood

A report was tabled for information on the Health Star Rating (HSR) labelling system and its application to the seafood industry. This system gives manufactured and packaged food products a star rating for their overall nutritional value and is voluntary for manufacturers at this stage. The system is meant to give comparisons for like products and it was agreed that there needs to be more consumer and industry education on the program. A review will take place in 2016 to measure industry implementation. The report was noted.

Communications update

Members noted an update on work the Food Authority's communications team has been doing since the last meeting in relation to the seafood industry. A seafood industry profile developed as part of the Food Authority's *NSW Food Safety Strategy 2015-2021* was also tabled for information. The PFA requested further information in relation to the source of some of the data presented in the Strategy, particularly in relation to the number of people employed in the NSW seafood industry.

Training workshops for fishers

Members were advised that the Food Authority could conduct targeted industry training workshops with fishers as a project area over the next 12 months. The Food Authority will be holding further discussions with industry to determine issues for the workshops which will be conducted through the Co-operatives and the PFA.

The next meeting of the NSW Seafood Industry Forum will be held on Wednesday 23 September 2015.