

NSW Seafood Industry Forum

Friday 30 November 2012

Summary of meeting outcomes

The newly structured NSW Seafood Industry Forum (SIF) held its inaugural meeting in Sydney on Friday, 30 November 2012. Specific issues considered by the Forum at its meeting are detailed below.

NSW Food Authority food safety program compliance report (2011-12)

The Authority provided an update on its compliance, enforcement and inspection activities during the period 1 July 2011 and 30 June 2012. This included a breakdown on total audits and inspections conducted and percentage of critical CARS (corrective action requests) issued by category, reasons for audit failures, and enforcement activities.

It was noted that overall the Authority is comfortable with the compliance program in the seafood industry sector. Main areas of non-compliance are with process control (eg temperature control) and analytical testing requirements (eg microbiological testing not completed). The country of origin (CoOL) compliance issues has reduced over the last few years, with the sale of prawns still remaining an issue. The SIF noted the compliance report.

AQIS Memorandum of understanding (MOU)

The SIF noted a paper on current arrangements under a new MOU between the Authority and AQIS (now DAFF) for regulatory audits of export establishments. Under the MOU, the Authority will undertake regulatory audits on behalf of DAFF for shellfish harvesters. DAFF will audit on behalf of the Authority, seafood processors and fishing vessels.

Operation Maxima

The SIF noted a paper reporting on Operation Maxima. Operation Maxima was a joint DPI investigation into compliance levels for commercial abalone harvest and the potential illegal sale of abalone. The mission of Operation Maxima was to evaluate the level of compliance in all abalone fishery programs, to complete a fishery compliance risk assessment and to develop strategic measures to improve overall compliance. The Authority was invited by NSW DPI Fisheries to join the operation to focus on food safety issues and traceability matters relating to abalone. The Authority involvement related to conducting food premises inspections investigating illegally harvested shellfish. As the result of the inspections, some minor issues were raised by Fisheries officers regarding the repackaging of abalone with no original labelling present. The abalone was being stored correctly and no black market abalone was found. During these inspections, some oysters were identified as not labelled with the required trace back information and, as the result, improvement notices have been issued to the licenced supplier. The improvement notices were issued specifically for the re-use of polystyrene foam boxes that previously contained raw fish and used again to store shucked oysters, and for the absence of labelling information with the required PR number or batch identifier or name and address of supplier. An issue that was identified during the inspections was the wet storage of live shellfish in shared aquariums with other species.

Wet storage of live shellfish in shared aquariums with other species

An issue that was identified during the Operation Maxima inspections was the wet storage of live shellfish in shared aquariums with other species. The wet storage of bivalve molluscs is considered a high risk activity and therefore extra precautions should be taken to ensure they are safe to consume. Bivalve shellfish species (oysters, mussels and clams) feed by filtering large volumes of water. They feed by drawing water across the gill surface, which then traps particles from the water and transports them to the mouth for ingestion. As they feed, bacteria, viruses and harmful substances that are in the water will be accumulated in the shellfish. If the shellfish are living in water which contains microbiological or chemical contaminants, or natural toxins, they will concentrate this

material in their gut. As people normally eat shellfish raw, and without removing the gut, they are likely to become ill if product is stored in a tank containing contaminants. This can occur when live shellfish are stored in aquariums with other species. This issue was discussed by the Forum and it was agreed that the Authority, in consultation with ASQAAC, develop a factsheet for distribution to local councils and seafood businesses in NSW highlighting regulatory compliance issues with respect to the wet storage of shellfish. This is to include translated material.

Toxic algal bloom – Botany Bay

SIF members were updated on the toxic algal bloom in Botany Bay. The bloom contained a paralytic shellfish toxin and a notification had been issued closing the area for harvesting. A recreational fishing warning is in place with warning signs displayed. Further testing will continue and the area will be reopened when test results show that the algal bloom has reduced to background levels and no longer presents any food safety issues.

FSANZ administrative review – carbon monoxide

The Forum discussed the FSANZ administrative review with respect to the carbon monoxide treatment of tuna. Carbon monoxide is used to retard the development of the brown colour that rapidly occurs in tuna flesh after it has been cut. This review is being conducted as there is some ambiguity in the wording in the code in regard to its use as a processing aid. The Authority is to provide details of the FSANZ review to SIF members out of session. This is to include the timeframe of the review including discussion papers.

IPART Licensing review

The Forum noted an information paper regarding a review currently underway by the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) of all licences in NSW. IPART is seeking information on licences that are unnecessary, have excessive requirements or are poorly administered in NSW. All of the Authority's industry committees have been made aware of this review and the 12 December 2012 closing date for submissions.

The next meeting of the SIF will be held in May 2013.