

Summary of meeting outcomes

Food Regulation Forum

Thursday, 4 April 2019

The Food Regulation Forum oversees the work of the Food Regulation Partnership (FRP). The latest meeting was held at the Griffith Leagues Club, situated at the Cnr Bridge Road and Jondaryan Ave, Griffith NSW 2680

Forum members present at the meeting were: Paul Braybrooks OAM (Chair), Lisa Szabo, NSW Food Authority (via teleconference), Ruth Fagan, Local Government NSW, Damien Thomas, Local Government NSW, Gina McConkey, Local Government Professionals Australia, Lisa Hughes, Environmental Health Australia, Andrew Davies (delegate for Peter Day, NSW Food Authority)

Guests present: Josie Rizzo, NSW Food Authority, Sarah Northam, NSW Food Authority (Minutes)

Apologies: Peter Day, NSW Food Authority, Robyn Hobbs OAM, NSW Small Business Commissioner (Independent), Julie Kisa, Development and Environmental Professionals' Association, Ms Fiona Stalgis, Development and Environmental Professionals' Association, Paul Harmon, Local Government NSW, Sarah Flowers, Environmental Health Australia, Craig Shadbolt (delegate for Peter Day, NSW Food Authority), Stephanie Croft (delegate for Robyn Hobbs, NSW Small Business Commissioner)

Meeting overview

Debrief of Griffith retail and food service information session:

Members discussed the issues raised from the floor during the retail session held in the morning. Questions from the audience included:

- Absence of Food Service Supervisor on site for long period of time

The legislation requires a Food Service Supervisor for each retail premises which processes and sells food which is ready to eat, potentially hazardous, and taken out of the original packaging prior to sale. The Food Safety Supervisor is not required to be present at all times whilst food is being prepared or handled although the food business must always maintain its food safety practices regardless.

- Determining whether a manufacturer requires licensing and whether the regulatory agency is NSW Food Authority or council

Some food commodities when handled require a licence issued by the Food Authority. Licence holders are regulated by the Food Authority. Retail and food service businesses – those which sell directly to the public – will usually be regulated by local councils. All other food businesses will fall under the remit of the Food Authority. If food businesses are unsure, they should contact the Food Authority for further advice.

These topics and responses will be noted and used to inform future papers or discussion pieces in relevant sessions with stakeholders.

Food Regulation Forum

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Food Regulation Partnership Champion Awards

Members received information on the proposed Champion Awards and discussed the receipt and selection from nominees. The FRP Food Surveillance Champion Awards were established to recognise outstanding performance and achievement in food safety surveillance by environmental health officers (EHOs), councils and groups.

There are 5 award categories which are determined biennially and presented at the FRP Workshops. Consistent with previous years, a sub-committee of the Forum was formed to decide on the award recipients. The presentation of Champion Awards will take place at the dinner at the FRP Workshop in August 2019.

***Campylobacter* Reduction Strategy**

Members were provided an overview of a current Food Authority initiative contributing towards both the NSW and national Foodborne Illness Reduction strategies.

Campylobacter is the most commonly notified cause of gastroenteritis in Australia and our illness rates are higher than other similar countries.

The Food Authority developed a program to reduce *Campylobacter*. During 2018, the Food Authority provided training to EHOs through their Regional Food Groups to inform on the risks and sources of *Campylobacter*.

The project was developed in consultation with various stakeholders, including key Food Authority staff and local council EHOs. To build on the training component, the subsequent phase of the project is survey work, which commenced in March 2019. This involves EHOs conducting targeted retail food inspections. 26 councils are participating in approximately 152 inspections.

The inspection focus will involve reviewing menus for potential *Campylobacter* sources, observing cleaning and sanitising procedures, testing surfaces for its effectiveness, providing educative information to proprietors, and sample collection of potential *Campylobacter* sources where appropriate.

The samples will be sent for analysis for the presence or absence of *Campylobacter*. Findings and observations will be recorded in a questionnaire, collated by the Food Authority and used to inform future work.

An update will be provided to the Forum in future meetings.

FRP Workshop

Members were provided a report on the Food Regulation Partnership (FRP) Workshop 2019. This event is currently in the planning phase and will be held on 21-23 August 2019 at Q Station Manly.

The biennial FRP Workshops has been held in 2013, 2015 and 2017. It aims to enhance Environmental Health Officers' (EHOs) food surveillance capacity, promote professional networking between EHOs, and strengthen the Food Regulation Partnership between councils and the Food Authority. It also provides opportunity for consultation on key messages and issues to a large group of stakeholders at the one time.

The previous two events were held in conjunction with Environmental Health Australia (EHA) NSW annual state conference. EHA have approached the Food Authority to host in partnership again. The EHA Conference is 19 - 21 August.

A joint dinner event will be held on Wednesday 21 August at which the EHA Excellence Awards and FRP Champion Awards will be presented.

The theme for the FRP Workshop is '*Turning up the heat on...*'. The draft program for the FRP Workshop includes a mix of speakers from the Food Authority and councils. It includes the launch of the Local Government Food Safety Inspection System, interactive speed networking session and 'Essentials Workshops' on labelling and investigations.

Local Government Skills Shortage

The Forum learned about developments on skills shortages for some professionals in the local government sector.

The Australian Local Government Association has produced a report on skills shortage in councils, e.g. town planners, EHOs. The shortages are due to lack of remuneration and experienced candidates. 60% of Local Government staff have unmet training needs.

Councils have called upon the NSW Government to address this shortage and lack of skills. Local Government NSW also approached NSW Government about options for increasing EHO training and subsidisation.

Local Government NSW has developed 12 priorities to focus on, e.g. university entrance levels, course in-takes, Aboriginal EHO training programs, getting on skills shortage list, subsidy list.

Members discussed VET qualified vs. university qualified courses for EHOs.

The Forum will look to influence developments on this issue in the future.

Food Safety Inspection Recording/Reporting Database

Members were provided an update on a reporting database proposal.

The Food Authority is co-designing a food safety inspection recording and reporting database with councils. The co-design included extensive consultation with a group of 23 councils and an agency reference group of local government managers, officers and administrators who all provided extensive input on the design. Local Government NSW (LGNSW) also participated strongly throughout this work.

The resulting proposal is a world class model utilising the most recent technology. A business case for the database was approved in October 2018 and prioritised for funding. A funding decision is expected by late June this year.

The Forum discussed the further development and policy work required to implement the database which is being conducted whilst funding is being considered. Subject to funding, it is proposed that the database will be piloted with around 10 councils in 2019-20 with full roll out envisaged from 2020-2021.

Report from State Liaison Group Meeting 28 February 2019

The outcomes from the latest meeting were noted and discussed by the Forum. Discussion points included:

- An update on the current foodborne illness outbreaks
- Promotion of the biennial FRP workshop to be held in August
- Information on the progress of the food safety inspection system development project
- Introduction of the next phase of the Food Authority's *Campylobacter* reduction strategy

Members noted the next State Liaison Group meeting will be in early July.

Follow up on 2017-18 Activity Reports

The Forum discussed the annual reporting of local council enforcement activities.

Members learned there are 132 areas in NSW regulated by 128 councils, OEH (in respect of Kosciuszko National Park), Lord Howe Island Board (in respect of Lord Howe Island), and the Food Authority (in respect of Sydney Harbour Federation Trust and the unincorporated far west).

The Food Authority has published an annual summary report of agencies' activities in the food retail and food service sectors on its website. Members have previously reviewed and discussed this report.

The new inspection database, if funded, will deliver more real time data and reduce administrative tasks for EHOs.

The date of the next Food Regulation Forum meeting is yet to be confirmed – likely to be July 2019.