

Summary of meeting outcomes

Food Regulation Forum

Thursday 7 August 2020

The Food Regulation Forum oversees the work of the Food Regulation Partnership (FRP). The latest meeting was held via teleconference due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.

Forum members present at the meeting were:

Mr Paul Braybrooks OAM (Chair), Mr Damien Thomas, Local Government NSW, Cr Ruth Fagan, Local Government NSW Cr Paul Harmon, Local Government NSW, Mr Angus Crichton, Environmental Health Australia, Erin Hogan, Environmental Health Australia, Ms Fiona Stalgis, Development and Environmental Professionals' Association, Ms Julie Kisa, Development and Environmental Professionals' Association, Ms Gina McConkey, Local Government Professionals Australia, Ms Arcadia Addams, OBO NSW Small Business Commissioner (Independent), Mr Peter Day, NSW Food Authority, Dr Lisa Szabo (NSW Food Authority) and

Guests present: Mr Andrew Davies, NSW Food Authority, Ms Sarah Northam, NSW Food Authority (Minutes), Ms Josie Rizzo, NSW Food Authority, Lisa Hughes, Environmental Health Australia

Apologies: Chris Lamont, NSW Small Business Commission

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

COVID-19 resources provided for the food sector

People, communities and businesses in NSW have been adversely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic on the back of drought and bushfires earlier in the year. To support the NSW food industry, the NSW Food Authority developed the following COVID-19 advice and resources:

Food industry resources

- Established a *Food businesses and COVID-19 (Coronavirus)* webpage providing advice for businesses on food safety aspects of COVID-19, workforce management and regulatory obligations - foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/help/covid-19-advice-for-businesses.
- Partnered with NSW Health to develop *COVID-19 awareness for food service* – a free, voluntary online training course to support our retail food sector in providing a COVID safe environment - <https://covidaware.instructure.com/enroll/J8BBYH>. Over 18,000 people have completed the course since it went live on 2 June 2020.
- Worked with NSW Health, other regulatory agencies and our colleagues in local councils to build a framework to support retail food service businesses and aims to achieve consistency in approach.
- Worked with NSW Health to develop a new information module for Registered Training Organisations to incorporate into their Food Safety Supervisor Training (mandatory).
- Worked with partner agencies to develop other resources and tools.

Food Regulation Forum

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Primary Industries resources

- NSW DPI established a COVID-19 Primary Industries Liaison Team and online resource to help primary producers navigate the challenges and impacts of COVID-19 on their business and industry. This included the establishment of 9 industry specific virtual working groups.
 - The COVID-19 Primary Industries Liaison Team can be contacted at covidinfo@dpi.nsw.gov.au
 - The online resource *COVID-19 advice* can be accessed at dpi.nsw.gov.au/home/covid-19
- More information regarding managing a primary production workforce in processing plants and manufacturing businesses and COVID-19 can be found at dpi.nsw.gov.au/home/covid-19/managing-primary-production-workforce

COVID-19 Safe food businesses

Members were appraised of the latest Public Health Order requirements as they relate to the retail food sector.

Hospitality venues such as cafes, restaurants, food and drinks premises micro-breweries, cellar doors, casinos, registered clubs, small bars and casino must complete a COVID-19 Safety Plan. They must also register as a COVID-safe business too.

The COVID-19 Safety Plan consists of a checklist of matters that need to be actioned to keep customers and staff safe from the risk of COVID-19. Those matters to be addressed within the business fall under broad categories: wellbeing of staff and customers, hygiene and cleaning, physical distancing and record keeping of patrons and staff. The operator of the business is responsible to implement and adhere to their plan.

Staff from several NSW regulatory agencies are authorised under the *Public Health Act 2010* to ensure businesses have a COVID-19 Safety Plan in place. They coordinate COVID compliance activities and ensure high risk venues comply without creating unnecessary regulatory burden (e.g. inspection by multiple regulators for both COVID compliance and other issues).

Inspections are spread between regulators with each having their own sector of responsibility. Retail food businesses are shared between DPI staff and local councils.

Local Government involvement in the COVID-19 response

The Food Authority has used its Food Regulation Partnership communication channels to inform local council Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) of the Public Health Orders and retail food business requirements. Three information/training sessions and a pathway for EHOs to complete electronic COVID-19 Safety Plan inspections have been provided.

Local councils EHOs (~ 500 staff with ~ 175 FTE deployed on food safety compliance) can be authorised to conduct COVID-19. Given the urgent need to check ~ 40,000 NSW retail food businesses are COVID safe, there has been a request for increased uplift in local government participation to ensure cafes, restaurants and food courts comply with the COVID-19 Public Health Orders.

State Liaison Group meeting 2 July 2020

Members were informed of the latest meeting held on 2 July 2020.

Representatives from the NSW Regional Food Groups (RFGs) of Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) met on 2 July 2020 to discuss operation matters of state-wide significance.

The main points of discussion at the most recent State Liaison Group meeting were:

- 2020 Retail Information Sessions & Forum Meetings - update
- Food Surveillance activity reporting 2019-20
- COVID-19 e-checklist, food service training and Q&As
- Food Safety Management National Project
- 2020 training and professional development for EHOs
- Preliminary results of the 2020 Food Authority/FRP survey
- Factsheets review project – overview and outcomes.

The next meeting of the State Liaison Group will be in October or November 2020. Forum members are invited to attend and observe.

Regional Food Group update

Forum members were provided an update on the Food Regulation Partnership Regional Food Group (RFG) Meetings 2020-21.

The main points of discussion are below.

RFG meetings have continued but without the professional development component. These were delivered mostly via webinar which still attracted 141 participants and provided the networking and information sharing opportunity.

The professional development element has since been re-introduced from July 2020. Again, this round of meetings are being delivered via webinar and all the necessary materials needed for the sessions are available on the FRP Portal.

Given the positive feedback received from those webinar sessions, the Local Government Unit developed a series of refresher training webinars to keep local council authorised officers engaged in food safety information.

The professional development topics were as follows:

- *Penalty Notices and Enforcement* hosted by Judd Owen with 164 attendees
- *Basic Food Microbiology* hosted by Josie Rizzo with 178 attendees
- *Assessing Compliance with the 2/4 hr Rule* hosted by Ruth Endicott with 159 attendees
- *Food Authority Update and Investigations* hosted by guest speaker Alan Edwards (Biosecurity and Food Safety) with 140 attendees.

All of the online webinars were extremely well attended and stakeholders requested further sessions into the future. Many welcomed the opportunity to learn and engage flexibly. These webinar sessions were all recorded and are available on the FRP Portal for future access.

One of the key strengths of the RFG meetings is based on its face to face nature. The Local Government Unit is mindful to return to normal operations but only when it is safe to do so. The decision to resume face to face meetings will be made in consultation with members of the groups and in adherence with current NSW Health advice.

The final round of professional development for 2020 will be a session on food labelling compliance.

Date of the next meeting

The date of the next Food Regulation Forum meeting will be towards the end 2020. The exact date and location will be determined soon.