

Summary of meeting outcomes

Food Regulation Forum

Thursday 24 March 2020

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

Forum members present at the meeting were:

Mr Paul Braybrooks OAM (Chair), Mr Damien Thomas, Local Government NSW, Ms Lisa Hughes, Environmental Health Australia, Mr Andrew Davies (delegate for Mr Peter Day, NSW Food Authority), Dr Lisa Szabo (NSW Food Authority) and Erin Hogan, Environmental Health Australia

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

Apologies: Cr Paul Harmon, Local Government NSW, Cr Ruth Fagan, Local Government NSW, Ms Gina McConkey, Local Government Professionals Australia, Ms Julie Kisa, Development and Environmental Professionals' Association, Ms Fiona Stalgis, Development and Environmental Professionals' Association, Ms Robyn Hobbs OAM, NSW Small Business Commissioner (Independent), Mr Peter Day, NSW Food Authority, Ms Myf Appleton, Environmental Health Australia

An overview of the meeting is below:

Report from State Liaison Group Meeting 26 February 2020

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

- An update on the last FRP Forum meeting in Blacktown on 7 November 2019
- Feedback on the National Project – Food Safety Management Tools
- Initial feedback on the FRP/Local Government Unit Vision Survey
- Feedback on the new Food Authority website
- Information was provided to stakeholders on the concerns surrounding food waste being used for pig swill

Members asked about the process for inspecting new food delivery businesses that might be set up during COVID-19. Members were informed that businesses must 'notify' their local council and follow appropriate food handling practices as per the Food Standards Code.

More COVID-19 information and advice will be developed and sent to local councils to assist them navigating any restrictions on the food retail sector.

Retail and Foodservice Information Sessions for 2020

Members were informed the Bega Valley meeting in Merimbula on 24 March 2020 had been cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions on both travelling and room capacities.

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The proposed joint session, co-hosted by Bayside/Georges River Councils in June/July 2020, will not likely proceed however the Food Authority and both Councils will monitor the COVID-19 situation in the meantime and follow the latest NSW Health advice.

Forum members will be informed once a decision is made.

Swill feeding and African Swine Flu EHO awareness

Members were appraised of a Department of Primary Industries initiative to raise awareness of the problems associated with swill feeding among retail food businesses. The improper disposal of food waste could lead to the introduction of African swine fever and/or foot and mouth disease in Australian domestic and feral pigs. Consequences are far ranging for the pork industry and food sector.

EHOs have been identified as a key stakeholder so were provided information at February's State Liaison Group meeting.

Update on Coronavirus on food

Forum members were informed the Food Authority has drafted guidance for food businesses for their operations during COVID-19. The resource is now available on the Food Authority website.

Forum members raised examples of the impact COVID-19 is having on food businesses, such as food handler hygiene problems and operators moving towards take-away/home delivery options. Some local councils have ceased routine food safety inspections.

All agreed that local councils need clear advice from government regarding the level of risk, protective methods and Food Authority expectations surrounding incomplete food safety inspection programs.

Authorised Officer Training – Allergen management and food safety culture

Forum members were informed of the latest round of training for Environmental Health Officers. The training outlines the steps of how an authorised officer can assess if a food business is adequately addressing the risk posed by food allergens as a potential contaminant during a routine retail risk-based food inspection. A number of training materials and other resources have been developed.

A food safety culture survey has been developed to build on that work. This work is part of the national foodborne illness reduction strategy.

Given the COVID-19 pandemic it is not clear if the proposed training will be delivered face to face or delayed until it is appropriate to proceed as planned.

Food Safety Management Working Group

Forum members were briefed on the work of FSANZ (Food Standards Australia New Zealand). They are working through a Proposal to consider additional food safety management tools for the retail food sector. This proposal may result in changes to Chapter 3 of the Food Standards Code.

The work continues into 2020 and Forum members will be kept informed of the progress of this work.

Local Government Unit / FRP User Survey 2020

Forum members were informed of the proposed survey to be circulated to all environmental health officers (EHOs) to identify what is working well and where improvements can be made in relation to the Food Regulation partnership (FRP) and the services provided by the Food Authority's Local Government Unit.

The survey will be conducted via through 2020 and the results will be circulated to all relevant stakeholders.

The final report will inform future work and other elements of the FRP.

Date of the next meeting

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