

Summary of meeting outcomes

Egg Industry Consultative Committee

18 August 2021

The Egg Industry Consultative Committee met via video conference on Wednesday 18 August 2021. Specific issues considered at the meeting are detailed below.

Attendees

Egg Industry Consultative Committee: Brett Langfield (NSW Farmer's Association), Melinda Hashimoto (Egg Farmers of Australia), Peta Easey (Egg Farmers of Australia), Peter Matusznyi (Manning Valley Free Range Eggs), Rowan McMonnies (Australian Eggs), Paul Pace (Pace Farm), Franko Pirovic (Pirovic Enterprises).

NSW DPI – Biosecurity & Food Safety: Joanna Blunden (Development Officer (Poultry Eggs)), Eric Davis (Manager, Food Policy & Partnerships), Peter Day (Director, Compliance & Integrity Systems), Jaime Garcia (Secretariat), Mark Mackie (Manager, Audit Systems & Verification), Ian Sanders (Director, International Engagement Unit), Helen Shaefer (Team Leader, Animal Welfare Policy & Programs), Lisa Szabo - Chair (Director Food Safety & CEO NSW Food Authority), Ryoko Uchida (Senior Industry Analyst, International Engagement).

Invited attendees:

Ben Antenucci (NSW Farmers Association), Dr Stephen Corbett (NSW Health), Professor Tim Discoll (USYD), Dougal Gordon (DPI, Group Director Livestock Systems), Gracia Kusuma (NSW Farmers Association), Alexander Russell (DPI, Director, Intensive Livestock Industries), Kristy Saul (DPI, Team Leader, Animal Biosecurity), Aditya Vyas (NSW Health).

Apologies: Geneveive Bonello (Manager, Communications Strategic Programs & Partnerships), Amanda Black (Senior Veterinary Policy and Project Officer), Sarah Britton (NSW Chief Veterinary Officer and Group Director Animal Biosecurity), David Cusack (Manager, Food Standards & Programs), Suzanne Robinson, (Director Animal Welfare).

Industry updates

Members discussed COVID-19 and its impacts. Members were joined by Dr Stephen Corbett from NSW Health and Professor Tim Discoll from University of Sydney to discuss COVID-19 issues and business continuity planning. This included Incident Action Plans (IAPs) for managing COVID-19 infected employees, use and limitations of saliva and swab based Rapid Antigen Testing (RAT) which can give results in under half an hour, higher rates of false positive results with RAT (particularly saliva based tests) compared with the standard real time PCR test, and the need to carefully consider how to deal with these false positives before adopting RAT as a workforce management tool. A fully vaccinated workforce would also increase the feasibility of using RAT as a workforce management tool

The need to manage COVID-19 and the consequences of lockdown orders is putting enormous pressures on the egg industry. A 14-day COVID-19 lockdown in a major producer would see eggs disappear from supermarket shelves. Dr Corbett indicated that good IAPs can greatly increase confidence that industry can manage COVID-19 infections. It was agreed that it is vital that industry prepares for and manages business continuity and food security given the high likelihood that employees will be infected with COVID-19 at some point. It was agreed there is an urgent need for an egg industry IAP and that industry would work with NSW Health to develop a generic IAP template that can be adapted for use throughout the sector.

In terms of prevention, there is a need to focus particular attention on places workers gather before, during, and after work, including car-pooling to and from work. Tea/meal rooms are a particular vulnerability as places where people can interact and contract infection. Change rooms and toilets are other obvious considerations. All planning needs to recognise that the delta variant is so infectious it can be transmitted by the most fleeting contact, even between people wearing masks. Workforce bubbles and split shifts are other tools that can be considered.

Infected people are asymptomatic for two days before they show symptoms so response to infection needs to rapidly identify and segregate close contacts. Technology such as CCTV footage and blue tooth proximity recording can help with this.

The issue of mandatory versus voluntary COVID-19 vaccination was discussed. Employer liability concerns for any adverse vaccination reactions currently prevents employers from mandating vaccination for their staff.

Food safety program compliance report

The Committee noted a report on egg industry compliance activities for the 2020-21 financial year. 76% of licensed egg producers recorded an improved audit and/or inspection result compared with the 58% compliance rate the previous year (a 18% improvement in compliance rate compared to the same period last year). DPI's goal to have all licensees compliant by the end of FY 2020-21 remains on track with most licensees already compliant. Members were informed that the low compliance rate is due to increased surveillance & monitoring to manage Salmonella Enteritidis.

Biosecurity (*Salmonella* Enteritidis) Control Order Assessment 2019-2021

The biosecurity and food safety compliance branch conducted assessments and inspected all licensed NSW egg farms to ensure compliance with the Biosecurity (*Salmonella* Enteritidis) Control Order. 241 egg farms were assessed twice for compliance, including 440 on-farm inspections. This resulted in 202 Individual Biosecurity Directions (IBD) and 20 sanctions. As of 1 July 2021, all licensed NSW egg farms operating complied with the Biosecurity (*Salmonella* Enteritidis) Control Order.

Note that impacts due to floods and fire delayed a significant number of on-farm inspections as licensees were impacted by these natural disasters. This program was also significantly impacted by COVID-19 with compliance staff required to conduct food retail premises inspections across NSW.

Measuring compliance with *Salmonella* Enteritidis (SE) testing as mandated by Control Order

The biosecurity and food safety compliance branch assessed compliance with *Salmonella* Enteritidis (SE) testing as mandated by Biosecurity (*Salmonella* Enteritidis) Control Order. SE test results completed since October 2020 were reviewed to identify licensees who had not submitted eggs for testing as mandated by the Order.

This compliance program covered 260 licensee's and found that 83 had not completed some or any testing as follows:

- 8 facilities cancelled their licence;
- 18 facilities were tested by a contactor and sample submission forms did not contain correct facility and licence data;
- 2 facilities have since completed their testing;

- 45 facilities have been issued with written warnings.

This compliance program has resulted in all licensees being fully informed of their obligations to conduct SE testing. Licensees who were issued with formal warnings are also aware that further failure to conduct SE testing may result in Penalty Notices being issued in future. DPI will continue to monitor this issue to ensure licensees are complying with testing requirements.

Small Farms Exemptions

Peta Easey presented a NSW Farmers Association paper advocating removal of NSW licensing and egg stamping exemptions for small egg farms to avoid any potential risk to human health and industry integrity, particularly in relation to *Salmonella* Enteritidis.

DPI advised that all eggs for sale in NSW must be stamped with a unique identifier unless the enterprise concerned produces less than 20 dozen eggs per week and the eggs are only sold directly from the farm gate. This means all eggs in the retail market-place must be stamped.

Producers selling less than 20 dozen per week need to notify the Department of their operation but are not required to be licensed. DPI advised that this group produces less than half of one percent of eggs sold in NSW and that egg associated *Salmonella* Enteritidis has not been reported in this group, but rather only on licensed egg farms producing more than 100 dozen per week and some egg handling facilities.

DPI also outlined the Better Regulation requirements that must be met in order to impose new regulations. Further, the requirement to re-make the *Food Regulation 2015* in 2022 provides an opportunity to consider this issue and for industry to bring forward robust evidence to support the changes it seeks. The work to remake the regulation is currently underway and DPI accepted the NSW Farmers paper and an earlier Egg Farmers Australia paper as submissions to this process.

It was acknowledged that all stakeholders will have opportunity to put forward submissions for consideration during the remake of *Food Regulation 2015* (which has been postponed to 2022 due to impacts of COVID-19).

Animal Welfare Update

Helen Schaefer provided a verbal update on the latest animal welfare issues with members noting the following:

1. The NSW Animal Reform Discussion Paper has been released for public consultation. Consultation closes 3 September 2021.
To view the Discussion Paper and for more information please visit:
<https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/animals-and-livestock/animal-welfare/animal-welfare-reform/discussion-paper>
2. The Independent Poultry Welfare Panel has completed the Final Draft of the proposed Australian Animal Welfare Standards & Guidelines (S&Gs) for Poultry. The next stage involves presentation of the Final Draft S&Gs, alongside a Decision Regulation Impact Statement, to the heads of agricultural departments (AGSOC) for their consideration. AGSOC will then determine next steps, which may include presentation to agriculture ministers.



International Engagement update

Nil

The date for the next meeting of the Egg Industry Consultative Committee is to be advised.