

Summary of meeting outcomes

Food Regulation Forum

25th May 2021

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

Forum members present at the meeting were: Paul Braybrooks OAM (Chair), Cr Phyllis Miller (Local Government NSW), Cr Ruth Fagan (Local Government NSW), Cr Marianne Saliba (Local Government NSW), Angus Crichton (Environmental Health Australia), Erin Hogan (Environmental Health Australia), Fiona Stalgis (Development and Environmental Professionals' Association) and Yael Lang (Development and Environmental Professionals' Association).

Guests present: Andrew Davies (NSW Food Authority), Josie Rizzo (NSW Food Authority) and Ruth Houston (NSW Food Authority).

Apologies noted from: Peter Day (NSW Food Authority), Dr Lisa Szabo (NSW Food Authority), Lisa Hughes (Environmental Health Australia).

This meeting was the first for the newly appointed Food Regulation Forum. The outcomes from the latest meeting were noted and discussed by the Forum. Discussion points included:

NSW Retail Food Surveillance Overview

New Forum members were provided an overview on the NSW food retail and foodservice sector and local government food surveillance activities over the period 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2020.

Reports provided by local council enforcement agencies show that food surveillance activity values are lower than previous years due to major event, with the example given of a 24% drop in inspections. 77% of high and medium risk food business were inspected which is a strong outcome given impacts and restrictions during this period. 49% of business scored 0-3 pts (5 stars) which again shows strength of performance in the sector. Food safety-related complaints received were again mainly in relation to hygiene & handling. Primary enforcement action continues to be warning letters, followed by improvement notices and penalty notices, with a graduated enforcement approach.

Information regarding support that Local Government Unit (LGU) provides to councils, including meetings and professional development training was outlined.

State Liaison Group meeting – Minutes from 11 May 2021 Meeting

Members were provided an update on the most recent State Liaison Group (SLG) meeting, held on the 11th May 2021. Members were advised SLG meetings are usually held 3 times per year, however an additional extraordinary SLG was held early in the year to introduce new Advisory Guideline. This guideline formalises the stakeholder meetings and included amending timing of the SLGs to after the rounds of Regional Food Group (RFG) meetings.

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Members commented that timing is really good to have an SLG meeting following the conclusion of the RFG.

There was a discussion between members about home-based businesses (HBBs) and how best to regulate them, noting there are some complexities involved in identifying and regulating them given their nature.

Authorised Officer Training - online delivery

Members were appraised of the latest developments of this project.

To support Environmental Health Officers with a baseline training for their food surveillance role the NSW Food Authority delivers the Authorised Officer (Local Government) Food Surveillance training course (Authorised Officer training). This program helps enforcement agencies to build capacity for their authorised officers. It provides a pathway for both new and experienced officers to gain or refresh their skills and knowledge in order to competently conduct food surveillance activities. It is traditionally delivered face-to-face.

Total Agricultural Centre has been engaged to help develop an online food surveillance training program. The content will have interactive and engaging material with quizzes and assessments to reinforce the learning. The training will include a two day face-to-face session at the conclusion. It is hoped to complete the program by mid-2022.

Retail and Food Service Information sessions for 2021

Retail and Food Service Information sessions are usually held three times per year, but due to COVID restrictions, only one was held in 2020. These sessions are an opportunity for the NSW Food Authority to work with local councils and reach retail food businesses. The first session for 2021 will be held in Maitland this Thursday 27 May and is fully subscribed. As a result of interest to this event, LGU is being engaged to deliver a session at a school in Maitland next month.

Members were informed the next session is planned for Mosman in July and Snowy Valleys later in year. Forum members were invited to attend. Members expressed the view they would like to have a presence at these meetings to show openness and transparency and that it is a great opportunity to meet the people in the industry.

FRP Workshop 2021

Forum members were appraised of the latest developments in the planning for the biennial FRP Workshop to be held in August at Rydges World Square Sydney.

The aim of the FRP Workshop is to promote networking, strengthen the FRP, and provide opportunity for consult on key issues. A draft program has been circulated broadly to Forum members and all NSW EHOs.

The theme of 'Building resilience and working together' is topical. There is a mix of Food Authority, external and council EHOs contributing to the program, which has been well received in the past. A Working Group has value added with great ideas, such as the moot court with a barrister in the program.

Forum members were invited to attend.

Forum members discussed the merits of awarding professional development points to delegates who attend the event.

The Local Government Unit agreed to further discussion with EHA and other interested parties about how best we can support the industry.

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.

The first round of RFGs for 2021 is now complete. Topic for training this round was on homebased, mobile and temporary food businesses. It was developed as a result of enquiries received from local councils regarding changes to business models during COVID restrictions. Great feedback was received from EHOs. Forum members were advised our training materials are available on the FRP Portal.

An additional webinar was held for those who couldn't attend the RFG meetings and 77 council officers attended.

Round Two training will cover the 'food notification project' regarding HBBs, which allows interest local councils to focus on HBBs, 'dark' (low-visibility) kitchens and other commercial kitchens that cater for the online delivery sector.

Food Regulation Partnership Forum Charter and Work plan

The latest Charter and Work Plan was circulated and adopted.

Support Programs for Environmental Health Officers

Forum members were informed of feedback received by the Local Government Unit from stakeholders about capacity building for the environmental health profession. Options were provided which includes:

- Providing 3 student prizes annually over 5 years at WSU
- Exploring a new concept re EHO exchange program – need feasibility study
- Exploring a 'shoulder-to-shoulder' 'buddy' program – identify champion EHOs that already exist to build capacity with food the priority. May need to liaise with other bodies eg EHA. Need to look into a lot of issues
- Support attendance of two EHOs to the FRP Workshop – opportunity for EHOs to attend who may find it difficult to get approval due to funding etc - to be decided by sub-group of the Forum

EHA have been looking at an exchange program and offered to contribute to these initiatives. These will be developed into 2022.

Organisation updates

EHA national conference will be held in the Blue Mountains 18-21 October 2021 and that a call for abstracts has been distributed (due 15/5).

Date of the next meeting

The date of the next Food Regulation Forum meeting will be held face-to-face in Mosman on the 15th July 2021, subject to any COVID-19 restrictions.