

Summary of meeting outcomes

Egg Industry Consultative Committee

6 April 2022

The Egg Industry Consultative Committee met via video conference on Wednesday 6 April 2022. Specific issues considered at the meeting are detailed below.

Attendees

Egg Industry Consultative Committee: Brett Langfield (NSW Farmer's Association), Peta Easey (NSW Farmer's Association), Peter Matuszny (Manning Valley Free Range Eggs), Rowan McMonnies (Australian Eggs), Franko Pirovic (Pirovic Enterprises).

NSW DPI – Biosecurity & Food Safety: Joanna Blunden (Development Officer (Poultry Eggs), Geneveive Bonello (Manager, Communications Strategic Programs & Partnerships), David Cusack (Manager, Food Standards & Programs), Andrew Davies (Manager Local Government Unit) Acting Chair, Jaime Garcia (Secretariat), Peter Gray (Senior Veterinary Policy and Project Officer Animal Welfare Unit), Mark Mackie (Manager, Regulatory Operations Unit), Helen Shaefer (Team Leader, Animal Welfare Policy & Programs), Byron Stein (Poultry Co-ordinator, Animal Biosecurity).

Apologies: Sarah Britton (NSW Chief Veterinary Officer and Group Director Animal Biosecurity), Eric Davis (Manager, Food Policy & Partnerships), Melinda Hashimoto (Egg Farmers of Australia), Melisa Norris (Senior Policy and Programs Officer, Food Policy and Partnerships), Paul Pace (Pace Farm), Lisa Szabo (Director Food Safety & CEO NSW Food Authority), Greg Vakaci (Acting Director, Compliance & Integrity Systems).

Industry updates

Industry members expressed their aspirations for NSW DPI to egg licensing and stamping exemptions for small egg farms as part of the staged repeal and re-make of Food Regulation 2015. These concerns were acknowledged by NSW DPI and will form part of amendments considered during the staged repeal process.

Industry members further raised concerns about the lack of transparency surrounding the biosecurity/food safety risk management practices in small layer flocks exempt from licensing under Food Regulation compared to licensed premises. Key issues discussed were:

- Lack of awareness of change in flock sizes over time (notification requires once only reporting and is not time bound). There was concern that some notified businesses were trading illegally as they should be licensed operations.
- Increasing sales of bird/eggs through online portals (e.g. Gumtree, local community association websites) with unknown food safety/biosecurity risk profiles. Concern was expressed this could be a potential future source of SE contaminated eggs where there is no on-farm surveillance monitoring.
- Concerns surrounding equivalence of biosecurity practices by purchasers of spent hens once released from large commercial operations should these animals continue to produce eggs for sale as part of smaller commercial operations.
- Potential data gap in the actual number of small egg operations known to NSW DPI due to COVID-19 pandemic possibly leading to an increase in the volume of eggs

traded through online portals by small operations. Concern was expressed these potential new operations may be unknown to NSW DPI.

- Equivalence/knowledge of biosecurity/food safety practices in schools keeping layers where eggs are sold compared to practices of licensed, commercial egg operations. Concerns were expressed these eggs could potentially be a future source of contamination with little to no preventive biosecurity/food safety practices conducted by schools.
- The continued, very sporadic detections of SE in the broader community (post the 2018-19 SE incident), coupled with nil on-farm SE detections on licensed premises provided by the current Biosecurity SE Control Order, suggest the source of SE is no longer licensed egg businesses. Concerns were raised this continued, very low incidence of SE may be due to unlicensed egg businesses.

At the previous EICC, DPI advised that producers selling less than 20 dozen eggs per week must 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 these producers must also stamp all eggs with a unique identifier unless the eggs are sold directly from the farm gate of a farm that produces less than 20 dozen eggs per week. This means all eggs sold from a retail food premises must be stamped, regardless of flock size.

DPI also previously outlined the Better Regulation requirements that must be met in order to impose new regulations. These obligations will apply to the staged repeal of Food Regulation 2015 in its consideration of requests from industry members of the EICC for change to the current regulations applicable to egg businesses.

It was acknowledged that all stakeholders will have opportunity to put forward submissions for consideration during the staged repeal of Food Regulation 2015 and the making of a new regulation.

Food safety program compliance report

Mark Mackie updated the Committee on the egg industry compliance activities for the 2021-22 financial year to date (July to December period). 93% of licensed egg industry businesses recorded an acceptable audit and/or inspection result. 58 audits & inspections were conducted in total, 35 audits were compliant, 23 receiving warning letters for non-compliance. Lower than usual inspection numbers are due to field officers focusing on the SE Control Order assessment process and the impacts of COVID-19 and floods .

Animal Welfare Update

Helen Schaefer provided a verbal update on the following animal welfare issues:

NSW Animal Welfare Reform process

NSW Government released the Draft Animal Welfare Bill in January 2022. This aligns with the Government's commitments under the NSW Animal Welfare Action Plan to streamline and modernise NSW's animal welfare legislative framework. The Draft Bill provided a third opportunity for stakeholders and the community to have their say on NSW animal welfare laws. Submissions closed 28 February 2022.

The Draft Bill is currently being reviewed by the Select Committee on Animal Cruelty Laws in NSW. The Committee's interim report is due for release by 30 May 2022 and more information is available on the [NSW Parliament website](#). The NSW Government will consider all feedback before introducing the Bill into Parliament.

Development of Australian Animal Welfare Standard & Guidelines (S&Gs)

Australian Animal Welfare S&Gs are developed under the direction of an Animal Welfare Task Group, which reports to the Agriculture Senior Officials' Committee. The task group includes representatives from each of the state and territory Department responsible for animal welfare, the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment and the New Zealand Ministry of Primary Industries.

A stakeholder advisory group (SAG) is formed to provide advice on the development of S&Gs for each industry or species. Each SAG includes veterinarians, animal welfare groups and industry representatives. The draft S&Gs are also released for public consultation, and community views are considered in the final S&Gs.

Final S&Gs are provided to Agriculture Ministers and it is then up to each state and territory government to implement these as appropriate for their jurisdiction.

Review of National Animal Welfare (S&Gs) Poultry

The draft S&Gs and associated regulation impact statement were presented to the national Agriculture Senior Officials Committee (AGSOC) in August 2021. The Commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment (DAWE) subsequently invited jurisdictions to provide feedback which will be considered before the S&Gs are finalised and provided to Ministers. The S&Gs and supporting regulatory impact statement (RIS) will be published at www.animalwelfarestandards.net.au once this has occurred.

Each jurisdiction will then consider how these are implemented. In NSW, this will need to include consideration of the NSW legislative and policy framework and processes.

Processing Establishments S&Gs

The scientific literature review of processing establishment practices for livestock welfare referred to at the last meeting is being finalised. The first meeting of the SAG for these S&Gs was held Wednesday 23 February 2022.

More information on national animal welfare policy and regulatory matters, can be found at [Animal Welfare Task Group \(AWTG\)](#)

National Salmonella Enteritidis Monitoring & Accreditation Program (NSEMAP) Update

Peter Gray provided a verbal update on the changes to application forms for (NSEMAP) accreditation certificates that are issued by DPI for accredited flocks, which can be used as evidence of the (*Salmonella* Enteritidis) free status of these flocks and their eggs for export markets. The NSEMAP is available to all commercial egg producers in Australia. The updated forms are now available on the DPI's website.

Biosecurity (*Salmonella* Enteritidis) Control Order update

Peter Gray provided a verbal update on the Biosecurity (*Salmonella* Enteritidis) Control Order program and notified members that a risk assessment has been conducted by NSW DPI to understand what would happen if the control order was removed when it expires on 30 June 2022. Feedback from industry and the Department is that some level of on-going biosecurity practice surveillance and monitoring is required to ensure the current gains in biosecurity/food safety practice achieved by the current Control Order are not lost.

There have been sporadic and very low levels of human SE infections post the 2018-19 outbreak. Epidemiological investigations have not been able to effectively trace the source of these continued, very low-level infections. However, they have been linked to the same WGS profile as the 2018-19 outbreak strain, suggesting there remains a very low-level

source of SE in the broader environment and supporting a need for continued monitoring and surveillance to ensure absence from layer flocks and food for sale.

The meeting discussed the upcoming review of the FSANZ Primary Production and Processing Standard for Eggs and Egg Products as a means of reviewing the national risk profile of the domestic flock. Industry members were urged to consider appropriate risk assessment questions that could inform this review as this is the likely first step in this process. The meeting was informed of a possible start date for the FSANZ review of July 2022 and would be kept informed of key developments in this area when known. David Cusack will liaise with Peta Easey, Melinda Hashimoto, Rowan McMonnies and Brett Langfield to this effect.

Japanese Encephalitis Update

Byron Stein provided a verbal update on the Japanese encephalitis virus (JEV) outbreak detected in piggeries across NSW, QLD, VIC and SA. JEV was detected in mosquitos as early as January 2022 even though the JEV outbreak was only detected in late February early March. The risk of JEV transmission is expected to drop considerably as we enter the winter period.

JEV is spread by mosquitoes which have bitten an infected animal. Pigs and some waterbirds are the animals most likely to infect mosquitoes. People and other animals such as horses can be infected by mosquitoes but are considered to be dead-end hosts (i.e. they won't pass the infection on, including by mosquito bites). There is no JEV risk associated with consumption of pork products.

A small proportion of infected people and horses will develop clinical signs which can include inflammation of the brain (encephalitis). A national One Health surveillance plan is being developed to identify where JEV is located. Mosquito control measures have been developed for piggeries, abattoirs and potentially sale yards which handle pigs.

A NSW JEV Control Order has also been issued to introduce movement and mosquito control requirements for JEV infected and suspect properties. From Monday 11 April 2022, the emergency response to JEV will change to a management framework.

https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/1391360/Biosecurity-JEV-Control-Order-2022-No-2-25.03.22.pdf

More information on mosquito control and JEV surveillance will be provided by health and agriculture agencies.

Health and safety of people working in higher risk occupations is paramount and NSW Health is currently liaising with Safe Work NSW. Mosquito management is set to be a high priority. Piggery workers are also being considered as a high priority group for JEV vaccination and the process of getting vaccination logistics in place for those higher risk groups has started.

Biosecurity update

Nil

The date for the next meeting of the Egg Industry Consultative Committee is 17 August 2022.