

Food Authority

Summary of meeting outcomes

NSW Seafood Industry Forum

10 May 2023

The NSW Seafood Industry Forum met via video conference on 10 May 2023. Issues considered by the Forum are outlined below.

Attendees

NSW Seafood Industry Forum members: Mark Boulter (Food and Beverage Importers Association), Olivia Churchill, (De Costi Seafoods (Holdings) Pty Ltd), Ross Fidden (Commercial Fishermen's Co-operative Ltd), Michael Kitchener (The Master Fish Merchants' Association of Australia), Erik Poole (Sydney Fish Market Pty Ltd), Russell Sydenham (NSW Aquaculture Association Inc).

NSW DPI – Biosecurity & Food Safety: David Cusack, (Manager Food Standards & Programs), Eric Davis (Manager, Food Policy & Partnerships), Andrew Davies (Manager, Local Government Unit - Acting Chair), Fahri Fahri (Acting Manager, Compliance Education & Behaviour Change), Jaime Garcia (Secretariat), Jeffrey Go (Senior Veterinary Officer Aquatic Biosecurity), Judd Owen (Team Leader, Animal Welfare Policy & Programs), Helen Schaefer (Team Leader, Animal Welfare Policy & Programs), Darren Waterson (Team Leader, Northern Region, Regulatory Operations Unit).

Apologies: Danielle Adams (Clarence River Co-operative Ltd), Tricia Beatty (Professional Fisher's Association Inc), Sarah Britton (NSW Chief Veterinary Officer and Group Director Animal Biosecurity & Food Safety), Kerry Strangas (The Master Fish Merchants Association), Lisa Szabo - Chair (Director Food Safety & CEO NSW Food Authority), Melissa Walker (Team Leader Aquatic Biosecurity Policy & Programs), Greg Vakaci (Director, Compliance & Integrity Systems).

Invited attendees: Bobby Tasev (National Quality Manager for Prawns at Tassal Group)

Industry updates

Members provided updates on the following key and emerging issues in their respective industry sectors:

- Land-based agriculture businesses are reporting good outcomes, although some farms in southern NSW and Victoria lost stock during the November floods, which has caused shortages of some fish species in NSW markets e.g. Trout.

Food Safety Compliance Report

Darren Waterson updated the Forum on seafood industry compliance activities for the 2022-23 financial year to date. Licensed seafood sector compliance remained at 95% despite an increase in audits and inspections across the sector. A total of 106 audits & inspections were conducted during this period, with a combined total of 10 regulatory

interventions (improvement notices, penalty notices, prohibition orders, or warning letters). The Varroa mite emergency response impacted business as usual activities in the seafood sector.

Publication of Food safety resources for fishers

Fahri Fahri from DPI's Compliance Education & Behaviour Change team provided an update on food safety resources developed to help fishers understand their food safety obligations. These resources are now available in various languages on the Food Authority's Website and will be mailed out to Members. From the first of July 2023, as part of the license renewal process, a Z card version will be included in the documentation that goes out to our stakeholders.

Paperless Food Safety Programs and record keeping

Russell Sydenham presented a paper on seafood industry aspirations to transition to Paperless Food Safety Programs and record keeping for seafood businesses. Commercial applications are becoming available across food manufacturing, food retail businesses and the restaurant sectors. This is something that DPI is happy to look at and it was agreed that Eric Davis would initially liaise with Russell Sydenham to scope this aspiration and consider what steps are needed to get this issue moving forward. Members were also informed that NSW DPI is considering a regulatory pathway pioneered by Dairy Food Safety Victoria for the Victorian dairy industry (Digital Regulatory Technology Program and the use of Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning to develop and implement an alternative compliance arrangement for licensees who demonstrate sustained compliance and a positive food safety culture).

White spot disease update

Jeffrey Go presented a paper on the detection of White Spot Syndrome Virus (WSSV) in Black Tiger Prawn (*Penaeus monodon*) in prawn farms in northern NSW.

White Spot Disease of Crustaceans (White Spot) is a contagious viral disease of crustaceans, caused by (WSSV) that was first detected in Australia in prawn farms in south-east Queensland in December 2016. This detection impacted all commercial prawn operations on the Logan River, and through active wild prawn and crustacean sampling, WSSV was detected in wild prawns in localised areas of north Moreton Bay during early 2017 and early 2018 and again in 2020. No WSSV was detected in sampling during 2019. NSW Department of Primary Industries (NSW DPI) has had control measures in place since 2016 to minimise the risk of WSSV spread from south-east Queensland to NSW and has since undertaken its own sampling of wild prawn populations and no evidence has been found of WSSV in NSW wild prawn populations to date.

WSSV was confirmed at an enclosed biosecure facility at a prawn farm in northern NSW in August 2022. All prawns within the facility were destroyed and the facility was decontaminated.

On 12 February 2023, NSW DPI was advised of the suspect detection of WSSV in farmed black tiger prawns (*Penaeus monodon*) at a Clarence River prawn facility. WSSV was subsequently diagnosed by NSW DPI and confirmed by the Australian Centre for Disease Preparedness (ACDP).

A Control Order was gazetted on 16 February to restrict movements of crustaceans and polychaete worms from the Clarence River control zone, and associated prawn farms. On 27 March 2023, the order was extended to 14 June 2023 to support risk management activities which underpin the continuation of trade in NSW and other parts of Australia.

On 24 February 2023, suspect WSSV was reported by a second Clarence River prawn farm with subsequent detection and confirmation at NSW DPI and ACDP. Samples taken at harvest from a Clarence River prawn farm were also confirmed positive by NSW DPI and ACDP on 21 April 2023

Surveillance within the Clarence Estuary commenced on 16 February 2023. Initial surveillance of wild caught prawns and crustacea found trace levels of WSSV DNA in a small number of wild caught prawns from the local catchment. NSW DPI confirmed on Monday 6 March 2023, that further results of wild caught prawn samples from the Clarence Estuary were negative for WSSV. There remains no evidence any active presence of WSSV in these wild prawn populations. Recent surveillance of wild crabs and plankton from the Clarence River estuary was also negative for WSSV.

Surveillance needs and priorities, including proof of freedom, are being considered by a national Aquatic Consultative Committee on Emergency Animal Disease (AqCCEAD) working group. Surveillance plans will be developed based on the Australian Aquatic Veterinary Emergency Plan (AQUAVETPLAN) Disease Strategy - White spot disease and the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH, previously OIE) Aquatic Animal Health Code.

NSW DPI is working closely with the affected farms, the seafood industry and other state and national bodies to ensure containment and management of WSSV. Formal control measures were issued to the affected farms, with biosecurity directions in place on each affected farm. These directions ensure appropriate biosecurity risk mitigation remains in place throughout the response.

Input from industry and key stakeholders is informing the development of ongoing biosecurity control measures. NSW DPI is exploring biosecurity management options, including a long-term surveillance program and zoning options, supported by stakeholder feedback and a cost benefit analysis. This extension also provides for activities to be completed on affected farms.

NSW DPI has overseen the accelerated harvesting and destruction at two of the affected facilities, while harvest had been completed on the third farm prior to the detection of WSSV. Eradication is continuing at the third infected premise. NSW DPI will continue working closely with industry, the Commonwealth, and other jurisdictions.

In consultation with AqCCEAD and the NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA), growout ponds at the affected farms are being decontaminated using chlorine, which is recommended by AQUAVETPLAN and is a nationally recognised decontamination method. This approach assures NSW trading partners that decontamination procedures follow the agreed national strategy for on-farm WSSV eradication. The EPA technical advice ensures that discharge from the farms meet defined water quality criteria and can be safely released into the environment.

Investigation of WSSV entry pathways has to date been unable to identify a specific origin for this virus in NSW. Genome sequencing indicates the recent WSSV strain shows strong similarity to the August 2022 strain but is different to the Logan River strain identified in 2016. Investigation of the source of WSSV at the Clarence River prawn facilities is ongoing.

While WSSV is a highly contagious viral disease of prawns and other crustaceans, it does not pose a threat to human health or food safety. NSW prawns and other crustaceans remain safe for human consumption. Consumers can continue to purchase NSW prawns from local seafood suppliers.

Water Storage for Oysters

Jeffrey Go presented a paper on the development of formal management measures for shellfish wet storage systems.

Wet storage of shellfish poses unique and significant food and aquatic biosecurity risks, that are currently not captured by formal or regulatory management measures. If done correctly however, wet storage offers benefits to industry in expansion and diversification of existing business models. The issues and opportunities associated with wet storage of oysters have been raised via the NSW Shellfish Committee and a working group has been established to address these.

The Shellfish Wet Storage Working Group was established and met for the first time on 25 November 2022. The group is led by and includes technical expertise of members from NSW DPI Aquatic Biosecurity, with other technical expertise also provided by members from NSW DPI Food Authority and NSW Seafood Industry.

The Shellfish Wet Storage Working Group is established to:

1. Provide technical and practical input into the development of risk-based management requirements, to ensure that shellfish wet storage systems meet biosecurity risk management requirements.
2. Provide input during the development of an appropriate legal instrument, by reviewing and commenting on drafts to ensure that management measures are reasonable, risk based and appropriate.
3. Guide and support an industry-wide consultation process on new biosecurity management measures and to ensure that current Food Authority requirements are reflected appropriately.

Industry will be provided with updates on the progress of the working group.

Online food handler basics training the Food Authority is developing and if this applies to fresh seafood retailers

Judd Own gave a verbal presentation on the change in the Food Standards Code [Standard 3.2.2A](#) specifically section (3.22, A Food Safety Management Tools) which will go live on

8 December 2023. This standard applies to food service and retail businesses which handle and/or serve potentially hazardous food that is ready to eat ([Std 322A overview](#)). Members were advised that if they're handling and processing potentially hazardous food that is ready to eat, then seafood retailers would definitely fall into the category that must comply with the new standard. There are three requirements that apply,

depending on the business's food handling activities (which determine whether it is a Category 1 or Category 2 business):

- [Food Handler Training](#) covering specified food safety principles
- A certified [Food Safety Supervisor](#); and
- [Evidence](#) to substantiate that key food handling processes have been managed.

The Food Authority is developing free online food handler training which will meet the requirements of this new standard and anticipates that will be available to industry towards the end of May.

<https://www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/retail/standard-322a-food-safety-management-tools>

It was advised that the requirement for fresh food retailers, including seafood retailers, to comply with the new standards will be reiterated through a future issue of Foodwise.

Mark Boulter, who represents the Food and Beverage Importers Association (FBIA) on this committee, and also works for UTAS advised that Oysters Australia has funded a two-year project led by University of Tasmania that is developing three tiers of training courses specific to shellfish growers. An induction course for anyone who works on the farm, a supervisory level course that will provide a broader depth of information, and a higher course that's been developed which is aimed at anybody who wants to become a regulator in the shellfish space.

Proposed remake of Food Regulation

David Cusack presented a paper on the proposed remake of the Food Regulation and advised that public consultation will occur later in the year for at least three weeks.

The current Food Regulation 2015 has been reviewed internally by the Food Authority. The current Regulation is fit for purpose, providing a regulatory framework to achieve the objects of the NSW Food Act 2003 and plays an integral role in ensuring food is safe for human consumption and that consumers are adequately informed prior to making purchase decisions.

The Food Standards and Programs team is proposing the following amendments (relevant to the seafood industry) for the new Food Regulation:

- Shorten the timeframe for food businesses to notify the Food Authority of samples which fail the microbiological standards in the Food Safety Schemes Manual.
- A general increase in fees, charges and penalties in line with the Consumer Price Index.

The Food Authority will alert members of the NSW Seafood Industry Forum when the proposed Regulation and Regulatory Impact Statement opens for public consultation.

The Food Authority will provide further updates on progress of this work at the next NSW Seafood Industry Forum meeting in September.

Biosecurity update

Jeffrey Go further updated the committee on QX detected in Sydney Rock oysters at Port Stephens in February and March 2022. NSW DPI was invited by Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC) to submit a formal funding application to better understand QX and the potential for any genetic differences between *Marteilia sydneyi*, the organism that causes QX, across different NSW estuaries. This submission has recently been completed and it is hoped this will support funding to improve our understanding of QX

Monitoring for QX continues as part of the "Window of Infection" study. While NSW DPI has continued sampling and testing in Tilligerry Creek and Karuah River, with QX detected at both sites, overall QX prevalence and outbreak duration seem somewhat reduced compared to last year and may reflect climatic factors. Further work is also underway to identify potential intermediate hosts involved in the QX lifecycle understand how these may influence QX disease dynamics and outbreaks.

The date for the next meeting of the NSW Seafood Industry Forum is 13 September 2023.