

Food Authority

Summary of meeting outcomes

Food Regulation Forum

5 December 2022

The Food Regulation Forum met via video conference on Monday, 5 December 2022 from 1.00pm – 3.00pm. Specific issues considered at the meeting are outlined below.

Attendees:

Food Regulation Forum: Mr Paul Braybrooks OAM, (Chair), Mr Anthony Zammit, NSW Food Authority for Dr Lisa Szabo, Cr Ruth Fagan, Local Government NSW, Ms Erin Hogan, Environmental Health Australia, Mrs Lisa Hughes, Environmental Health Australia Mrs Fiona Stalgis, Development and Environmental Professionals' Association Ms Yael Lang, Development and Environmental Professionals' Association.

Invited Attendees:

Mr Eric Davis, NSW Food Authority (guest), Mr Andrew Davies, NSW Food Authority, Ms Josie Rizzo, NSW Food Authority, Ms Ruth Houston, NSW Food Authority, Mr Judd Owen, NSW Food Authority, Ms Katherine Gash, NSW Food Authority.

Apologies: Cr Phyllis Miller, Local Government NSW; Dr Lisa Szabo, NSW Food Authority; Cr Helen Tickle, Local Government NSW, Ms Maryanne Saliba; Mr Greg Vakaci, NSW Food Authority.

1. Welcome and Introduction

The Chair opened the meeting at 1.00pm and provided a warm welcome to all members and guests, including an Acknowledgement of Country.

The minutes of last meeting from 16 May 2022 were adopted as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

2. DPI Strategic Plan 2022-2030 – Food Safety

Verbal presentation by Anthony Zammit

Mr Zammit advised DPIs Strategic Plan for 2022-2030 has moved from activities to 'projects' which are assessed against the DPIs main strategic outcomes. Food Safety is with Animal Welfare with outcomes aligned. This new approach aims to improve cooperation and ensure the DPI is operating more broadly rather than in individual branches and silos.

The FRP is a very important part of Food Safety, with Councils acting as the interface between the consumer and where our food is produced. The FRP is pivotal in assisting deliver the strategic plan, and the DPIs objectives.

The report was noted.

3. Discussion and feedback on the draft Strategic Statement of the Australia New Zealand Food Regulation System

(particularly page 4 - Regulators Commitments/Undertakings) – *Discussion led by Eric Davis*

Food ministers have a number of priorities across the food regulation system, and one of those priorities is reforming the food regulation system itself to make sure that it's fit for the future and make sure that it's robust and forward and future facing. There are some ideas that are coming forward in that space and a couple of these ideas have been released, including a food regulators handbook.

In NSW we don't have the authority to impose anything on Councils as they regulate more than food. We justify and explain, we don't direct as its part of a collaborative approach, and an essential part of our partnership. Feedback will be forthcoming from the State Liaison Group.

4. Food Regulation Partnership (refer to papers)

4.1 Activity Reports 2021-22 (including demo) - Josie Rizzo & Judd Owen

The paper and supporting documentation were noted. Overview of the main points:

- All activity reports were completed.
- The number of EHOs undertaking food work is stable, while the number of inspections has dropped.
- 3 styles of letters were provided to councils as Enforcement Agencies this year.
- letters for not undertaking any food inspections last year and asking them to reach out to us if they have any issues with prioritising food
- A letter to councils who have had below average number of inspections of high and medium fixed businesses over the last three consecutive years. So less than 77% inspections 2 years ago, less than 80% of inspections last year and less than 69% of inspections completed.
- A third and general letter type was sent to the remaining Councils thanking them for their work in food safety
- The new reporting dashboard displaying the data and headline measures was demonstrated
- On request of the Forum, the Food Authority will reach out to Local Government NSW to include an article on this in their weekly newsletter

4.2 Regional Food Group Meetings – Ruth Houston

The paper was noted. All RFGs have been completed with the majority now face-to-face meetings. There is still a web link and copy of the recording is also available on the portal.

Round 1 – Food Act Investigation Tips, for example collecting evidence

Round 2 – Allergens and the Food Safety Culture Survey which closed on 30/11/2022

Round 3 – Food Safety Management Tools Information Package

Training topics for next year have been received from EHO's and include;

- Food Incident Recall and Complaints Unit including food borne illness investigations,
- Food safety management tools because of the changes to the Food Standards Code (Round 2, 2023)
- Dishwashers not being at the correct temperature, so they weren't cleaning and sanitizing the food contact surfaces properly during inspections, and that may have contributed to foodborne illness outbreaks.
- Other topics may include allergens, or information on kebabs.

4.3 State Liaison Group meetings – Josie Rizzo

A very brief discussion issues of a state-wide significance.

Report was noted.

4.4 Managers Forum – Judd Owen

Held yearly. With all Councils with the aim to target Food Safety Managers in a supervisory capacity and provide an update on what is happening food safety wise around NSW including any potential issues or to highlight the work being completed by food surveillance.

Report was noted.

4.5 Retail and Food Service Information sessions – Katherine Gash

This year we partnered with six Councils to deliver six RISs across a diverse mix of regional and metropolitan locations including: Mosman City Council in Mosman, Snowy Valleys Council in Tumut, Wollondilly Shire Council in Picton, and a Food Safety Roadshow – a collective of three food RISs being held in different locations within close proximity over three separate days back to back with Lake Macquarie City Council in Argenton, Cessnock City Council in Cessnock and Port Stephens Council in Nelson Bay.

The next RIS will be in conjunction with Tweed Shire Council on Thursday, 16 February 2023 in Tweed Heads, NSW. Food Regulation Forum members are invited to attend the session should they wish, however, there will not be a Food Regulation Forum meeting at this time.

EOI's to host a RIS in the second part of 2023 have been circulate with EOI's closing later this week with several nomination received from a combination of regional and metropolitan Councils. Nominations will be collated and provided to the FRF in an out of session meeting in the new year.

A meeting of multi-chain organisations is being planned for 31 May 2023 (to be confirmed), where key representatives would likely attend (e.g., QA Managers). Amendments to the Food Standards Code are underway, so this meeting would be timely to engage with these organisations. This is planned to be held in Sydney, followed by a face-to-face meeting of the Food Regulation Forum.

The report was noted.

4.6 Authorised Officer Online Training (including demo) – Ruth Houston

The Food Authority is launching the AO training for AO's who will be conducting food inspections under the Food Act tomorrow. The course is on-line via the Tocal website, one participant per Council who must obtain 100% across 22 on-line topics including an assessment portfolio assessment report, evidence matrix, warning letter, improvement notice for assessment. At the conclusion all participants will be invited to a 1-day workshop in Newington and meet wider experts from the NSW Food Authority. A video demonstration was shown to the Forum that will complement the training package.

Concerns were raised regarding the number of place available. There may be capacity to increase the number of attendees next year, however all participants must be working for a Council.

The training modules were built in collaboration with Tocal College (part of the DPI) as a lot of our BFS on-line training has been created under Tocal. Concerns were raised by several members that the University of Western Sydney (UWS) was not engaged. Advice was provided that this is a generic professional development course for Authorised Officers in Councils.

A brief discussion ensued around the EHO shortage in NSW with suggestion that the Food Authority could consider a program similar to NSW Health where they partner with some Councils to place trainee Aboriginal EHOs into Councils. The Food Authority was asked to consider linking with Education department/careers advisers to promote EHOs as a career path. This suggestion was noted.

4.7 FRP Workshop 2023 & FRP Champion Awards - Josie Rizzo

Biannual FRP conference and workshop for AO where we can brief them on food safety matters of concern will be held on 27-28 April 2023.

The agenda is attached to the paper.

The Committee were asked if they would like to participate in any way, including being part of a sub-group for the FRP Champion Awards. Ruth Fagan and Paul Braybrooks, Lisa Hughes wish to participate.

The report was noted.

5. National working group projects (refer to papers)

5.1 Food Safety Management tools P1053 - Std 3.2.2A – Judd Owen

Standard will be gazetted on 8 December 2022 – with a 12-month lead-in time to be live and in-force on 8 December 2023.

All state governments throughout Australia will be working to prepare their councils and the hundreds of thousands of food businesses this year that this will impact. We have been on the front-foot with RH informing Councils in previous RFG training rounds.

5.2 Food Safety Culture (including demo) – Josie Rizzo

The purpose of the working group was to develop a shared understanding of food safety culture across the whole system for businesses and regulators, which sits in the same priority group as reducing foodborne illness. We conducted a survey during the last few months with 14 councils that looks at allergen management to gauge what level of food safety culture exists in a food business. The 150 data points are being analysed with the feedback directed back to the national working group early in the new year.

A video was shown.

6. Organisation updates

Verbal updates from representatives on their activities relevant to the partnership

EH advised the EHA – State Conference 13-14 September 2023 in Wagga Wagga.

7. General business

7.1 Other business

Training pathways and increasing the number of qualified EHOs was raised given the current shortage in this profession was discussed. There are currently 12 accredited EHA courses around Australia including the University of Western Sydney undergraduate degree. EHA also attend career days and expos to promote the EHO role.

Forum members requested raising the skills shortage as a priority in NSW on the skills list and suggested the Food Regulation Forum write to Minister Dugald Saunders about the long-standing EHO shortage in NSW and attracting new people to the industry and the multifaceted EHO role. The Food Authority will liaise with Paul Braybrooks to achieve this suggestion.

- 8.** The date for the next meeting of the Food Regulation Forum is proposed to be a face-to-face meeting following the Retail Information Session with multi-chain organisations around the first half of 2023 in Sydney (tbc).

- 9.** The meeting closed at 2.54pm