

FOOD STANDARDS NEWS



The Newsletter of Food Standards Australia New Zealand

September 2003

FSANZ UPDATES

PUBLIC COMMENT SOUGHT ON CHANGES TO FOOD CODE

Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) invites public comment on a number of possible changes to the *Food Standards Code*:

Review of minimum age labelling for infant foods (P274) – Initial Assessment

Recently revised Australian National Health and Medical Research Council guidelines recommend exclusive breastfeeding until six months, and the introduction of solids at around six months of age. Currently Standard 2.9.2 in the *Food Standards Code* permits labelling of infant foods as suitable 'from 4 months'. Food Standards Ministers have asked FSANZ to raise a proposal and seek public comment about this potential inconsistency.

Plant protein products as a wine processing aid (A482) – Draft Assessment

These processing aids are wine clarifying agents and are derived from plant protein. They can be used to produce wine suitable for vegan and vegetarian wine consumers. FSANZ has conducted an assessment and found that these processing aids are safe and technologically justified. FSANZ welcomes comment on issues arising from an approval of these plant proteins as a wine processing aid, including the potential costs and benefits to consumers, industry or government.

Lysophospholipase as a processing aid (A492) – Draft Assessment

Lysophospholipase is an enzyme which assists with the process of extracting glucose and maltodextrins from wheat starch. FSANZ has conducted an assessment and found that this processing aid is safe and technologically justified and is now seeking public comment, including information to assist with its cost benefits analysis.

Geographic indicators to describe spirits (A459) – Initial/Draft Assessment

The current regulations allow for spirits to be bottled and sold at 37% alcohol by volume

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Labelling survey for consumers

One of the principal objectives behind the development of new food standards is to ensure that labels are easy to interpret and that they deliver information that is easy to understand and use, thereby enabling consumers to make informed choices about the foods they purchase.

The quantitative survey undertaken this year was based on the qualitative research we completed and published on our website in March 2002. The qualitative research assessed the awareness, knowledge and behaviour of consumers in relation to food labelling issues. This latest survey will be used to benchmark any potential changes for consumers that may occur after the new regulatory measures are implemented.

Labelling survey results

The results of this study confirm the qualitative research findings that different consumers use labels for different reasons and in different ways. For example, date marks were used more regularly for perishable foods and

allergen declarations were relied on more for baked products such as biscuits and dairy foods.

The research indicates that there is a relatively high level of prompted awareness of most label elements, with health claims, novel foods and irradiated labels having the lowest prompted awareness. Some consumers use many more label elements than others. The most widely used label elements were the date mark, ingredients list and Nutrition Information Panel (NIP) with over two thirds or more consumers reporting their use, and the least used were the GM declaration, health claim, allergen declaration, novel and irradiated food declarations. However, with the exception of health claims, these label elements are only mandatory on food labels of products containing these ingredients and, in some cases, reflect new labelling provisions in the Code. Awareness and use might,

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GM food passes labelling tests

On 1 August 2003, FSANZ released the results of an Australian pilot survey that shows that manufacturers in Australia are complying with the labelling standard for genetically modified (GM) food.

The standard requires any food, food ingredient or processing aid produced using gene technology and containing novel DNA and/or novel protein to be labelled as 'genetically modified'. This standard also allows up to 1% unintentional presence of GM food or ingredient in a final food.

All foods produced using gene technology must be safety assessed by FSANZ prior to release on to the market for human consumption. Hence, the labelling of GM food is not a safety issue, but one of consumer information. It enables consumers to make a choice about the food they wish or do not wish to eat.

In December 2000 the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Council (comprising Australian and New Zealand health ministers) agreed to a labelling standard for GM food that came into force in December 2001.

At its meeting in Perth on 1 August 2003 the Australia and New Zealand Food Regulation Ministerial Council agreed that it is essential for consumers to have confidence that GM food is labelled in accordance with the standard and noted that all State and Territory governments have worked together on a small pilot survey to test a range of foods to determine whether they contained any GM material.

The 51 samples tested came from the commonly eaten foods containing soy or corn: soymilk (12), cornflakes (7), tacos (4), corn chips (13) and bread (15).

The survey found that all the samples tested complied with the GM labelling standard. The unapproved Starlink GM corn was not detected in any of the corn products tested. Where traces of GM material were found, these were from approved GM foods that have been rigorously assessed for safety by FSANZ.

From the 51 samples tested, 5 soymilk, 3 taco and 2 corn chip products were found to have small traces of GM material, well below the 1% unintentional presence permitted without being required to label.

New Zealand will publish the results of their compliance project shortly, which shows very similar results to those found in the Australian survey. The UK Food Standards Agency (UK FSA) has also recently published a report on a UK GM survey. Only 8 of the 91 products surveyed by the UK FSA were found to contain GM material, but were below the UK's 1% 'adventitious presence' permitted threshold.

Consumers in Australia and New Zealand can feel confident that FSANZ is continuing to carry out safety assessments on genetically modified food to ensure that approved GM foods are as safe and nutritious as their conventional counterparts. Should a food not pass this safety assessment it will not be permitted for sale. To date 21 GM foods have been approved in Australia and New Zealand.

The full *Australian Pilot Survey of GM Food Labelling of Corn and Soy Food Products* can be found on the Food Standards Australia New Zealand website www.foodstandards.gov.au or www.foodstandards.govt.nz.

◀ Labelling survey for consumers cont.

therefore, be expected to be lower than for other label elements.

The prompted awareness and use of nine of the fifteen elements included in the research differed between Australia and New Zealand consumers in the study, with New Zealanders reporting higher awareness and use for the NIP, advisory statements, warning statements, GM declarations, preparation and storage instructions, and novel food declarations. Respondents from New Zealand also reported higher awareness of the ingredients list. Australian respondents reported higher awareness of nutrient claims, and a greater proportion reported using the country of origin label than consumers in New Zealand.

Consumers reported using, on average, five label elements, with a range from 1-14 elements out of a total of 15 label elements that were assessed. Across all label elements there were two key reasons reported for label non-use: disinterest in labels and habit or previous positive experiences with foods, rendering the use of labels unnecessary.

Endorsements, such as the Heart Foundation's 'Pick the tick' and date marks were rated by consumers as the most clear and easy to understand and were rated the most trustworthy. The GM declaration and the country of origin labels were deemed the least clear.

The survey results demonstrate that most consumers do not appear to have any trouble in reading and interpreting NIPs on a single product. However, they struggle to carry out product comparisons using this nutrient information. The results suggest that consumers are confused as to the relative value of nutrient composition. When comparing the merits of two products, consumers tend to focus on one nutrient only, and their evaluative thinking is dominated by fat levels. When given a choice, many consumers choose a product slightly lower in fat over one where the difference in another nutrient, such as sodium or salt, is greater in value.

Consumers in this research had difficulty with the interpretation of nutrient claims (for example, 'this product is reduced in salt' or 'this product is 94% fat free') with approximately half misunderstanding the meaning of the nutrient claims that were assessed in this study. Given these consumers' responses, it is likely that many would make poor food choices as a result of their misinterpretation of nutrient claims.

A quarter of respondents were aware, when shown an example of an ingredients list, that the ingredients are presented in descending order of quantity. Previous research with consumers indicated that once aware of this, many consumers found this information useful.

Similarly, these results indicated that most consumers had no trouble correctly interpreting percentage ingredient labels, once they were aware of them.

A 'may contain nuts' allergen statement was least likely to be considered very useful by consumers who purchased food for allergen sufferers, compared to the total sample, over half of whom considered it very useful.

Although nearly all consumers were aware of date marks when prompted, just under half the consumers surveyed did not understand the actual information given in the date mark. For example, the 'use by' date mark, was considered to be 'only a guide' and that it was quite safe to eat food products after the use by date had expired.

The survey findings indicated that the availability of easy to understand information for consumers was crucial to the successful implementation of the labelling standards in terms of achieving the desired outcome of making information available to consumers to enable them to make an informed choice. These findings supported FSANZ's decision to produce and distribute a poster on food labels to health professionals and schools and to include a section on the use and interpretation of food labels in the consumer booklet, 'The official shopper's guide to food additives and labels — know what you are eating at a glance'.

From the NZ office

At the request of the New Zealand Dietetic Association (NZDA), staff from both FSANZ and the NZFSA visited four centres around New Zealand to speak to local branches of the NZDA and other invited members. Three-hour seminars covered the goals of both FSANZ

and the NZFSA, food standard and policy setting processes, Food Standards Code (FSC) labelling requirements and information on a variety of projects currently being worked on by FSANZ. All sessions were well attended and generated a volume of positive feedback.

In between the NZDA presentations was the NZIFST-DIANZ conference. In addition to the FSANZ Chief Executive Officer Graham Peachey, who gave a keynote address on the second day of the proceedings, FSANZ was represented by two staff from the NZ office. The FSANZ stand in the exhibition hall generated much interest from the conference goers and was a great way to meet and have face-to-face discussions with stakeholders.

The NZ General Manager, Hugh Baber, spoke at the NZ Juice Association conference in Queenstown. Hugh gave an informative talk on food regulations and in particular the impact on the juice industry.

The Maori Reference Group - Kahui Kounga Kai, recently said farewell to one of its founding members, Makuini McKercher. Makuini was the first Maori dietitian in New Zealand and has spent most of her career in nutrition promotion. She has made a valuable contribution for developing a system to improve Maori participation in food standards development.

FSANZ and the Kahui Kounga Kai will greatly miss her expertise, wisdom and knowledge.



The Maori Reference Group - Kahui Kounga Kai, left to right Laurie Wharemate; Hiki Pihema, FSANZ Board member (front); Pania Hammond (back); Makuini McKerchar; Rongo Wirepa, Kaumatua.

APEC Capacity Building Workshop and Symposium for Harmonisation of Food Safety Regulations in Fisheries and Seafood Products – Kuta, Bali, 23-27 June 2003

Dr Luba Tomaska, FSANZ was invited to be one of the eight speakers at the Workshop and Symposium. Two major aims of the meeting were to share information about the development of food safety regulations in the APEC regions, serving as a base for examining the potential for mutual recognition of food

safety regulations. Australia presented a number of talks on the recent reforms to its food regulatory system, focusing on the drivers for the reform and the need to discharge its WTO (specifically SPS and TBT) obligations to ensure that food safety standards in Australia and, where relevant in

New Zealand, are based on scientific risk assessment, protect public health and safety and impose minimum necessary regulation. Presentations were also made by WTO, USA, EU, Japan, NZ, Thailand and Indonesian speakers.



FSANZ Board meets with primary production regulators



[Left to right] Hon Rob Knowles, FSANZ Chair, Ms Barbara Wilson, CEO Safefood Queensland, Ms Ann Astin, CEO Dairy Food Safe Victoria, Mr George Davey, CEO SafeFood NSW and Mr Graham Peachey, CEO FSANZ

FSANZ Updates continued

(ABV) in Australia and New Zealand. For spirits with geographic indications (GI spirits) the regulations require products bottled in the country of origin, Australia or New Zealand to be bottled at a % ABV required by the laws of the country of origin. For example, Scotch whisky bottled in Scotland, Australia or New Zealand must comply with the laws of the U.K. which state that the product must be bottled at no less than 40% ABV. However, a GI spirit bottled in a third country would not have to comply with the laws of the country where it is produced and so could be bottled at 37% ABV. FSANZ is seeking public comment on the costs and benefits whether the standard should be amended.

GM soybeans (A2704 and A5547-127) (Application A481) – Draft Assessment

A comprehensive safety assessment has been undertaken by FSANZ on food derived from LibertyLink soybean lines A2704-12 and A5547-127. LibertyLink soybeans contain one novel protein, phosphinothricin acetyltransferase (PAT), which confers tolerance to the herbicide glufosinate ammonium. PAT has already been assessed by FSANZ (Applications A372, A375, and A380). The safety assessment did not identify any public health and safety concerns associated with the genetic modification to the soybean and concluded that food derived from soybean lines A2704-12 and A5547-127 can be considered as safe and wholesome as food derived from other soybean varieties. Public comments are sought.

Sodium chlorite as a processing aid (A476) – Draft Assessment

This application is to allow the use of acidified sodium chlorite to reduce the number of micro-organisms during the processing of fruit and vegetables, raw poultry, red meats and raw or cooked comminuted or formed meat products (salami-like products). Sodium chlorite is already permitted to be used as a bleaching, washing and peeling agent. FSANZ is seeking public comment.

Copper citrate as a processing aid in wine (A463) – Initial/Draft Assessment

The applicant has developed an improved method for removing hydrogen sulphide odours in wine using sodium chlorate. FSANZ has conducted an assessment and found that this processing aid is safe and technologically justified and is now seeking public comment.

Tall oil phytosterols in low-fat and no-fat milk (A508) – Initial Assessment

Parmalat Australia Ltd has applied to FSANZ seeking approval for the use of tall oil phytosterols (TOPs) as a novel food ingredient in low-fat and no-fat liquid milk products. The applicant claims that TOPs have cholesterol lowering properties.

Foods which have no history of safe human use are known as novel foods and must undergo a safety assessment by FSANZ before being permitted in the food supply. The use of TOPs and phytosterol esters derived from vegetable oils as novel food ingredients has already been approved by FSANZ for use in edible oil spreads and margarines. However, these spreads and margarines must be labelled as 'not suitable for children or pregnant or lactating women' and 'that people on cholesterol reducing drugs should consult a medical adviser before use'. The level of consumption is self-limiting in edible oils and margarines as people can only consume a certain quantity of these products. This application to add TOPs to low-fat and no-fat milks proposes to expand their use further into the food supply.

Collagen as a processing aid during production of wine (A503) - Initial Assessment

FSANZ has received an application from Devro Pty Ltd to permit the use of collagen as a processing aid during production of wine. Collagen is claimed to act in a comparable way to other widely used clarifying agents in wine, such as gelatine and fish collagen (isinglass). It works by irreversibly binding polyphenolic and tannin materials from wine which are then removed along with most of

the added collagen. Collagen is not approved elsewhere in the world specifically for wine treatment as a processing aid to clarify wine.

Phospholipase, sourced from *Streptomyces violaceoruber*, as a processing aid (A501) - Initial Assessment

Genencor International has applied to FSANZ to approve, as a processing aid, the use of a new enzyme phospholipase which is sourced from the microbe *Streptomyces violaceoruber*. Processing aids are required to undergo a pre-market safety assessment by FSANZ before approval for use in Australia and New Zealand. The enzyme is used to produce a modified lecithin which can be used in the baking, confectionery, dairy fats and beverage industries but is not limited to these products. Currently porcine pancreas is the only permitted source of phospholipase A2. It is anticipated by the applicant that the use of this enzyme derived from a microbial source will lead to Kosher acceptable foods that use enzyme modified lecithin as an ingredient. The enzyme is not sourced from a genetically modified organism.

Resistant maltodextrin (RMD) as a dietary fibre (A491) - Initial Assessment

Matsutani Chemical Industry Co Ltd has applied to FSANZ to recognise resistant maltodextrin (RMD) as a dietary fibre and to include a specific method of analysis for dietary fibre in foods containing RMD. There is no universal consensus on a definition for dietary fibre, and often this term has referred only to the insoluble and indigestible parts of plants, or 'roughage'. Recently however, other substances that are soluble or can be partially digested have been shown to produce the physiological effects that are associated with traditionally accepted forms of dietary fibre.

Submissions: Submissions for P274, A452, A482, A492, A459, A481, A476 and A463 should be received by FSANZ by **27 August 2003**

Submissions for A508, A503, A501 and A491 should be received by FSANZ by **24 September 2003**

FSANZ Seminar Series

WHO representative visits Canberra

Mr James Akre from the World Health Organization (WHO), Geneva, visited Canberra in late July. During his visit, Mr Akre met with staff from several arms of government including FSANZ, the Department of Health and Ageing, and Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry – Australia (AFFA) as well as some members of the APMAIF (Advisory Panel on the Marketing in Australia of Infant Formula). He also gave seminars to FSANZ staff and also to health professionals within the ACT community.

Mr Akre's particular interest is infant and young child feeding and he has had a long association with the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes, and more recently, with the WHO Global Strategy of Infant and Young Child Feeding. He also represents WHO at the Codex Committee on Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses.

Mr Akre's message focused on the considerable positive health and societal benefits of breast feeding and issues related to improving breast feeding rates. WHO work



[left to right] Ms Janine Lewis (FSANZ), Ms Jenny Hazelton (FSANZ), Mr James Akre, WHO, Ms Sue Campion (FSANZ), Professor Colin Binns, Curtin University, and Ms June Hicks, Nutrition Australia at the recent seminar conducted at FSANZ.

relevant to FSANZ's Proposal P274 – Review of Minimum Age Labelling of Foods for Infants, and Codex matters relating to infant feeding were also discussed.

Mr Akre was primarily in Australia to speak at the International Lactation Consultant Association conference in Sydney. He had previously visited Canberra in October 2000.

FSANZ Seminar Series

Chair of Special Expert Committee on TSE meets with FSANZ staff



Dr Marion Healy, Chief Scientist FSANZ and Professor Graeme Ryan, Chair of Special Expert Committee on TSE at the recent seminar conducted at FSANZ.

Professor Graeme Ryan, Chair of the NHMRC's Special Expert Committee on TSE (Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies) was in Canberra to chair the next meeting of the Special Expert Committee on TSE. The best known form of TSE is 'mad cow disease' (BSE).

This visit to Canberra enabled Professor Ryan to talk to FSANZ staff on "Preventing and limiting the spread of transmissible spongiform encephalopathies in Australia" and the work of this committee.

Professor Ryan's message focused on the types of TSEs and the history of the disease bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) and how it spread through the United Kingdom and Europe. He also spoke about the BSE control measures, the links with vCJD (variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease) and the prevention measures adopted by Australia.

For more than 20 years, Professor Ryan has had senior leadership and management roles in medical research, education and health care. These roles included 10 years as Dean of Medicine at the University of Melbourne and then, from 1996 to 2000, as Chief of Clinical Services, Inner and Eastern Health Care Network in Melbourne.

As well as his part-time role as Director of Research Strategy at The Alfred Hospital, he is currently Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital, a Governor of the Ian Potter Foundation, a member of the Board of the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth), and Chairman of the NHMRC Special Expert Committee on Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies.

National standard for seafood safety takes shape

New food safety regulations being developed for the seafood industry by Food Standards Australia New Zealand will help to maintain Australia's reputation as a producer of high-quality, safe seafood.

Foodborne illnesses are generally on the rise around the world. The revised seafood safety laws, designed to address critical points in the production and processing of the food, will provide consumers with added measures of safety against these illnesses.

FSANZ's General Manager Food Safety, Greg Roche, said a new national seafood standard would draw on the best of existing State by State approaches as well as establish for the first time, national uniformity for the sector.

'We are working with the seafood industry and the jurisdictions to design regulations which will achieve our safety goals while not imposing an undue compliance burden on the industry,' Mr Roche said.

'The new seafood standard will be based on international risk management principles which will enable Australia to provide levels of seafood safety equal to the best in the world.

'The standard will be mandatory in all states and territories and will apply to the harvesting and processing of seafood.'

Mr Roche said FSANZ had established a Standards Development Committee to assist it in its work, with representatives from consumer groups, peak seafood industry associations and from Commonwealth and state agencies that would be responsible for enforcing the new regulations.

He believed that the involvement of industry and the jurisdictions in the planning stages of the seafood standard would result in a smooth transition to the new standard, which is likely to pass into law in mid-2004 and become effective a year later.

'The next milestone in the process will be the release of a Draft Assessment in December, including a draft standard, and a second opportunity for interested parties to comment on the proposed regulations,' Mr Roche said.

'The new national seafood standard will be an important step in enhancing Australia's growing reputation as a source of seafood that is safe and healthy.'

He reflected that progress to date had been greatly assisted by the willingness of the Seafood Standards Development Committee to provide advice and guidance.

'The expertise around the table has been instrumental in scoping future directions in this field', Mr Roche said.

New Technical Report Series available

FSANZ has released its second series of Technical Reports. Like the previous series, the reports are scientific reports based on currently available scientific data and are used for the assessment of applications to change or develop food standards.

There are ten reports in this series and the topics are as follows:

- TRS 16 - Oil derived from glufosinate-ammonium tolerant and pollination controlled canola
- TRS 17 - Food derived from bromoxynil-tolerant cotton transformation events 10211 and 10222
- TRS 18 - Food derived from insect-protected and glufosinate ammonium-tolerant DBT418 corn
- TRS 19 - Food derived from bromoxynil-tolerant canola line Westar-oxy-235
- TRS 20 - Monosodium glutamate (MSG)
- TRS 21 - Erucic acid in food
- TRS 22 - DHASCO and ARASCO oils as sources of long-chain polyunsaturated fatty acids in infant formula
- TRS 23 - Food derived from glufosinate ammonium tolerant corn line T25
- TRS 24 - Food produced from glyphosate-tolerant sugar beet Line 77
- TRS 25 - Food produced from glyphosate-tolerant corn line NK603

The Technical Reports are now available from our website

<http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/mediareleasespublications/technicalreportseries/technicalreportserie2094.cfm> and limited hard copies on request from the Information Officer on phone 02 6271 2241 or email info@foodstandards.gov.au.

Food Recalls 2002 – 2003

The total number of food recalls coordinated by FSANZ for the year 2002-2003 was 75. This figure is slightly higher than recent years due largely to recalls as a result of labelling errors. This figure included 30 recalls which were due to imported products (40%) which had been incorrectly labelled.

Under the new Food Standards Code, which came into effect on 20 December 2002, it is a requirement for all food manufacturers and importers to declare certain food allergens on food product labels. As a result of this requirement, a number of companies and government agencies conducted routine testing leading to a higher number of allergen-related recalls than normal.

Number of recalls	Reason for recall
31	Labelling errors, ie product includes ingredients not listed on the label and could cause an allergic reaction, eg peanuts, gluten, egg, milk.
22	Microbiological health risks, eg Listeria monocytogenes, Salmonella, E.coli, etc.
8	Inclusion of foreign matter, eg glass, metal etc.
7	Chemical contamination (Calcium oxide used as desiccating agent, contains unpermitted levels of sulphur dioxide, contaminated with lubricant).
4	Other – unpermitted additives, unfit for human consumption, fermentation.
2	Product deterioration.
1	Biotoxin contamination.

Australia and New Zealand Food Regulation Ministerial Council JOINT COMMUNIQUE

Food Ministers agree to a range of policy initiatives

The Australia and New Zealand Food Regulation Ministerial Council met in Perth on 1 August 2003. As the body responsible for food policy development in Australia and New Zealand, it made a number of important policy decisions.

Maximum Residue Level Harmonisation (within Australia)

The Ministerial Council agreed to a process to harmonise the Maximum Residue Level (MRL) setting procedures of the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority and Food Standards Australia New Zealand. The ultimate aim is to establish one set of published MRLs that regulate safe food and safe chemical use in agriculture.

The agreed approach is based on the harmonisation of administrative processes, monitoring and review of the new harmonised assessment process and, subject to satisfaction with the new processes, the issuing of a single MRL.

Phase Out of Ethylene Oxide in Australia

The phase-out of Ethylene Oxide (EtO) use in Australia for the treatment of herbs and spices is now complete. The Ministerial Council has been assured that 100% of the Australian Food and Grocery Council's products (representing 99% of trade by volume sold in Australia), are no longer treated with EtO. This has been achieved through the use of steam sterilisation, batch selection and good manufacturing practice.

Numerous mechanisms have been used to ensure that small producers and importers of herbs and spices, representing the remaining 1% of trade by volume sold in Australia, are also aware of their responsibilities relating to the phase-out of EtO.

The Ministerial Council would like to thank the Australian Food and Grocery Council for their contribution to the phase-out of EtO.

Review of Labelling of Genetically Modified Food

When the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Council agreed to a new labelling regime for genetically modified (GM) foods in December 2000, Australia and New Zealand were amongst the first countries in the world to implement GM food labelling requirements. Ministers had therefore requested that the new requirements be reviewed in three years to assess what has happened internationally.

The Ministerial Council today agreed to terms of reference and consultation questions for the review. The terms of reference are:

"Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) will conduct the review and prepare a report for the Australia New Zealand Food Regulation Ministerial Council, governed by the following terms of reference.

1. Prepare a review of GM food labelling legislation or regulation internationally (proposed and existing), with a particular focus on the EU, USA, Canada, and APEC countries.

2. Compare the current Australian/New Zealand requirements for GM food labelling with the requirements of countries listed in (1).
3. Examine consumer attitudes in relation to the labelling and acceptance of GM foods, where they have been publicly reported in Australia/New Zealand and those countries listed in (1).
4. Summarise developments in the Codex Alimentarius Commission in respect of a standard for the labelling of GM food.
5. Prepare in association with New Zealand Food Safety Authority and Australian state and territory authorities a summary of implementation of the GM food labelling standard in Australia and New Zealand and report on compliance and enforcement with the Standard to date."

The terms of reference and consultation questions will be available on the FSANZ website.

Emerging Iodine Deficiency in Australia

Ministers noted the progress undertaken in Tasmania in relation to the Tasmanian Iodine Supplementation Program and the emerging evidence of mild iodine deficiency in Australia and New Zealand. Ministers were supportive of the implementation of a national iodine nutrition study which should provide further evidence of any emerging deficiencies.

Stakeholder Forum - Wellington NZ

As part of FSANZ's commitment to consultation a stakeholder forum was held in Wellington following the May Board meeting. The forum was well attended with a wide variety of representatives from government, industry and consumers.

FSANZ Chair, the Hon Rob Knowles welcomed participants and was delighted with the number of attendees, many of whom took the opportunity to ask questions from the floor or discuss with individual members of the Board issues of interest.

The Forum was addressed by Chief Executive Officer, Graham Peachey, who highlighted the

importance of the trans Tasman relationship and the role of engaging effectively in consultation with stakeholders.

Also giving an address was Chief Executive Officer, New Zealand Food Safety Authority (NZFSA), Andrew McKenzie, who outlined the respective roles and responsibilities of his agency including an overview of the legislation and the implementation of the *Food Standards Code*.

As part of the question and answer session that followed a range of topics were covered including fortification; research, health and nutrition claims; labelling including allergens

and minimum aged labelling of food for infants; implementation of the Code and retail sector concerns around the interpretation of 'free claims'.

Overall the forum was highly successful with participants commenting that it was useful to have a range of representatives present so views from a number of view points on current issues could be heard.

The next stakeholder forum will be held in conjunction with the FSANZ Board meeting in Brisbane in September later this year.

Chief Scientist Dr Marion Healy discusses the risks in the seafood sector

As part of the scientific and technical analysis underpinning the development of the national seafood primary production and processing standard, FSANZ is considering the risks to public health and safety posed by each of the major seafood sectors. All significant food borne hazards for each seafood sector across the production and processing chain are being examined.

The approach adopted to estimating the risk from each seafood sector is consistent with the principles for risk analysis that were adopted by the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) at its recent meeting. The estimation particularly draws on the elements of risk assessment, namely hazard identification, hazard characterisation, exposure assessment and risk characterisation.

Many hazards are common to a wide variety of seafood commodities/sectors, including heavy metals (eg mercury), natural toxins (eg ciguatoxin, algal biotoxins) and other chemicals, microbiological contaminants (eg *Listeria monocytogenes*, *Vibrio Spp* and *Salmonella Spp.*) and parasites. The identification and characterisation of hazards has therefore been performed for the seafood sector as a whole. It has drawn on the extensive risk assessment work carried out as part of the review of the *Food Standards Code*, as well as other assessments performed in Australia and overseas.

The risks posed by specific commodity/hazard combinations for seafood in the Australia market place have been considered. The risks are then ranked based on the hazard associated with specific commodities/sectors that pose the highest risk. The broad seafood sectors being analysed are molluscs (eg

oysters, bivalves, cephalopods), finfish and crustacea (eg prawns, lobsters, crabs). These sectors have been further subdivided on a risk basis.

As risk is defined by the CAC as 'a function of the probability of an adverse health effect and the severity of that effect, consequential to a hazard(s) in food', these two parameters are considered in determining the risk from each hazard as well as each sector. The severity of an adverse health effect is determined using a three-level ranking that ranges from events that are life threatening to those that are self limiting and of short duration.

The likelihood of exposure to an infectious or toxigenic dose of a food hazard is determined on the basis of consumption of various types of seafood, using information from the national nutrition survey, and the prevalence and level of the hazard in the seafood. Consideration is also given to epidemiological data linking food borne illness with the presence of the hazard in seafood, although this type of information is quite limited for the Australian population.

A decision matrix using the severity and likelihood parameters is applied to estimate the risk posed by each seafood commodity/hazard combination. These estimates are then pooled to develop an overall risk ranking for each broad sector and its sub groups. Points along the supply chain at which hazards may be introduced, increased, decreased or eliminated are also taken into account. This 'across the supply chain analysis' identifies the key food borne hazards associated with particular types of seafood which, when combined with information on production and processing practices, provides the basis for developing intervention strategies to minimise the risks to public health and safety.



What is FSANZ?

Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) protects the health and safety of the people in Australia and New Zealand by maintaining a safe food supply.

We are a bi-national independent statutory authority that develops food standards for composition, labelling and contaminants, including microbiological limits, that apply to all foods produced or imported for sale in Australia and New Zealand.

In Australia, Food Standards Australia New Zealand develops food standards to cover the whole of the food supply chain – from paddock to plate – for both the food manufacturing industry and primary producers.

Food Standards Australia New Zealand works in partnership with Australia's Commonwealth, State and Territory governments and the New Zealand Government. We also seek to engage industry, consumers and public health professionals in our work.

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ORDERING THE FOOD STANDARDS CODE

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