

Food for Thought

Issue 1 - July 2008



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Contact Details:

For contributions, enquiries or feedback regarding the newsletter, please feel more than welcome to contact a member of the Team.

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Welcome to the Food Unit's first newsletter!

Introduction

We hope that you enjoy reading our new quarterly publication and find it a useful tool!

In distributing this publication we hope to:

- build stronger relationships with local government and industry,
- develop communications with stakeholders and the public,
- report on current trends,
- share food safety cases from around the country and the world and,
- provide advice and updates on legislative requirements.

The Food Unit was established by merging the food, meat and dairy safety branches. We are responsible for food safety and nutrition across the entire food industry, from primary production to point-of-sale. The Policy Team primarily provides input into state and national policy development and the Operations Team is involved with surveillance and investigations relating to food, food premises and food poisoning incidents.

Meet the Team!



Back [L-R]: Bill Kellow, John Itzstein, Bill Calder, Sophe Williamson, Sharna Walsh, Rod Dixon, Intan Chen (formerly Tedjasukmana), Terry Mazzucchelli, Billy McMullan, Rex Boaden, Christina Pollard, Stan Goodchild
Front: Pam Digby, Kema Rajandran, Marilyn Macfarlane, Kylie Neaves
Absent: Peter Garner, Kim Marks, Enita Ostojic, Judith Smith, Kim Unwin,

The Team

Manager

Stan Goodchild

Team Leader (Operations)

Bill Calder

Coordinator of Food Monitoring Program WA

Sharna Walsh (*Acting*),

Kim Unwin (*Leave*)

Scientific Officers (Operations)

Rex Boaden (Bunbury)

Intan Chen

Rod Dixon

Peter Garner

John Itzstein

Bill Kellow

Terry Mazzucchelli

Kim Marks

Billy McMullan

Enita Ostojic

Team Leader (Policy)

Sophe Williamson

Senior Scientific Officer (Policy)

Marilyn Macfarlane (*Temporary*)

Scientific Officers (Policy)

Kylie Neaves

Kema Rajandran

Manager, Nutrition

Christina Pollard

Senior Program Officer, Nutrition

Pam Digby

Admin Support Officer

Judith Smith

The Food Act

The Food Act has been passed by Both Houses of Parliament and was assented on 08/07/2008.

Sections One and Two of the Act come into effect immediately with the remainder of the Act on a day fixed by Proclamation.

WA will be contributing to a greater national consistency in food regulation through its undertaking in the *Food Regulation Agreement 2000 (as amended 2002)*.

Planning is underway to ensure its successful implementation, so watch this space for updates!

(Any questions regarding the Food Act can be emailed to: foodsafety@health.wa.gov.au. Your questions will be used to create a FAQ fact sheet).

Notification of Convictions

People are now able to go online to check up on restaurants or other food businesses that break health laws.

The website currently lists prosecutions that have taken place under the *Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code* or the *Health Act 1911* over the past 12 months, provided on a voluntary basis by local governments. The list can be found at: <http://www.health.wa.gov.au/envirohealth/food/index.cfm>

Fish Names Standardised

Seafood Australia launched the Australian fish names scheme on 24/06/2008.

For the first time one name to each of Australia's 4500 fish species will make it far harder for unscrupulous fish mongers to sell cheap varieties under incorrect names.

The Scheme provides seafood businesses with the capacity to achieve and demonstrate their compliance with the [Australian Fish Names Standard AS SSA 5300](#).

The Fish Names Brand Scheme addresses the most important issue for purchasers of seafood identified in major seafood consumer surveys conducted in Australia over the past two decades.

The biggest case of mislabelling was in WA in November 2005, when operators of a Fremantle restaurant were fined \$15 000 for fish substitution.

Healthy Dining

Current trends suggest that in the next twenty years nearly one- third of Western Australian children will be overweight or obese.

An incentive by the Catering Institute of Western Australia and supported by the Department of Health of Western Australia aims to encourage restaurants and cafes to improve their children's menus by providing and promoting healthier options in their establishments.

This new criteria is a big step towards increasing the availability of healthy meals for children in eating establishments.

The children's menu should contain limited high fat, fried options and focus on exciting and tasty vegetables and fruit items and water should be available at all times.

The Family Dining Gold Plate award now includes new criteria for Children's Menus. This award will be presented for the first time this October.



Health Goes Healthy

Workplaces will finally have healthier options available due to a new policy.

The *Healthy Options WA* policy supports healthier choices by eliminating deep fried foods, chocolates, chips, sweets etc and applies to all WA health care services and facilities which include canteens, kiosks, cafes and vending machines.

The policy initiative encourages food services to display and promote healthier options at point of sale, enabling consumers at a glance to select healthier food items. This policy is currently being implemented and will be mandatory by 31 December 2008.

The *Healthy Options WA* policy was developed on similar lines to the traffic light labelling system operating in Queensland.

Under *Healthy Options WA* all foods supplied for sale are rated considering their sugar, salt, saturated fat and energy content into categories:

Green - healthier items,

Amber - choose these carefully,

Red - little nutritional value,

Black - energy dense food and drinks with little nutritional value will be eliminated.

Front of Pack Labelling

The Australia and New Zealand Food Regulation Ministerial Council is presently considering how a uniform front-of-pack labelling (FOPL) scheme such as traffic lights may fit within broader public health strategies.

A working group has been exploring the efficacy of a range of FOPL schemes and is expected to make commendation to Ministers in October this year.



Food Safety Presentations

As part of being the centre of excellence in food, our officers often present lectures.

Recently, a Managers Training Seminar for Roadhouse Managers was held in Perth.

Intan Chen was invited to speak to the group about safe food handling and hygiene matters.

Feedback received was excellent and the Food Unit will continue to give these presentations as needed.

If you'd like any information with regard to the presentation, please do not hesitate to contact Intan on (08) 9388 4926 or email:

Intan.Tedjasukmana@health.wa.gov.au



Intan presenting to Roadhouse Managers

Food Poisoning Outbreak

An outbreak caused by infection with *Salmonella Virchow* occurred late 2007.

It was investigated by OzFoodNet in cooperation with the Food Unit and Environmental Health Officers from the City of Stirling.

The outbreak resulted in 22 cases of infection notified to the Department of Health. Samples from affected people had the same genetic type (PFGE) of *Salmonella*.

Interviews with cases indicated that 19 people had consumed sushi from two stores owned and operated by the same family. A raw egg mayonnaise was considered a likely source of the salmonella.

All food and environmental samples, including the mayonnaise, were collected from the premises and all were negative for *Salmonella*.

The eggs used in the mayonnaise were sourced from a Queensland distributor. Two *Salmonellae* isolated from egg pulp samples in Queensland also had the same genetic type as the cases in Western Australia.

Delivering a Healthy WA

A Queensland farm supplied eggs to the egg pulp company and to the distributor that supplied eggs to the implicated food premises, suggesting that this farm may be the source of contaminated eggs.

This outbreak has highlighted that raw egg products are high risk and should not be eaten. Premises should use a pasteurised egg pulp, which is readily available from local suppliers, to minimise the food poisoning risks associated with such foods.

Product Contamination

A joint national police investigation established a number of metal objects discovered in products were the result of a faulty cooking implement used in consumers' homes.

The contaminated products bought at supermarkets in Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia and Western Australia were confirmed as not being tampered with but rather the result of metal pieces fragmented from metal tongs, commonly used in food preparation, cooking and serving.

A Queensland Health spokesperson said there had been no reported instances of injury but anyone using metal kitchen tongs is urged to be vigilant when preparing and cooking food.

Source: NSW Food Authority

The Power is Off! Is Your Food?

A new pamphlet titled "The Power Is Off! Is Your Food?" has been developed.



It addresses the food safety issues of power failures and makes suggestions as to how to assess the safety and the safe storage of foods during power outages.

The pamphlet will bring some improved understanding as to when a food is still safe to refreeze or use. Copies are available from the Department of Health (1300 135 030) or <http://www.public.health.wa.gov.au/>

Food Safety Plans

The Environmental Health Directorate received a special commendation for the 2007 Implementation of Food Safety Plans into Hospitals as part of the Healthy WA Awards.

The Healthy WA Awards recognise the innovative work being undertaken by Department of Health staff in providing quality health care to the people of Western Australia.

The Awards promote and inspire best practice and continuous improvement, and provide an opportunity to recognise those employees who tirelessly strive to better our public health services and celebrate their achievements. This year a total of 45 nominations were received for the six award categories.

The work on the building and operation of food safety plans in public hospitals has created a closer working relationship between the Environmental Health Directorate and all public hospitals. The Food Safety Plans into Hospitals program aims to reduce the incidence of food borne disease in WA health facilities.

Partnering with catering staff has eased the burden in complying with new legal requirements. There is also the potential for significant cost savings for health services and regions.

This project has been led for many years by Greg Evans and supported by Rod Dixon and Walter Arrow.

Greg and Walter have recently left the DoH to pursue other endeavours. Best wishes from the Food Team.



Walter Arrow, Greg Evans, Rod Dixon

For food safety inquiries please contact the Food Unit on:

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Thoughts, comments and topic suggestions are also welcomed.