

Important food regulation drivers in Australia



...the end result is a whole-of-food chain, nationally focused, food regulatory system that enhances public health and safety.

Deon Mahoney (FSANZ, 2006)

According to Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) (2006) food safety issues such as foodborne illness is a key driver of food regulation. National statistics include:

- Contaminated food caused approximately 5.4 million cases of gastroenteritis per annum
- 1.2 million visits to medical practitioners
- 2.1 million days of work lost per annum
- Total cost of foodborne illness in Australia is estimated at \$1.249 billion per annum
- Attribution back to food vehicles is a major issue.

Recent research suggests that the pattern of foodborne disease has changed substantially in industrialised countries in recent decades. Outbreaks are more likely to be far reaching, and some are even global in scale because of widespread food distribution and changes in methods of food preparation. Further changes in the incidence of foodborne disease and the pattern of food-related illness can be anticipated from global warming. As a result of changed conditions in food production and

In particular, we are now faced with the emergence of antimicrobial drug-resistant bacteria and a number of viruses not previously recognised. Foodborne contamination can also have a major effect on food industry and trade in Australia. The food industry in Australia generates >\$29 billion in food production, with >20% of products exported, and \$57 billion in food processing (Hall and McKirk, 2005).

There are also some contemporary food issues driving legislation in Australia that are briefly displayed below –

HISTORICALLY	TODAY
Locally produced food, with known nutritional benefits.	Global food supply – unfamiliar foods and new ingredients.
Traditional recipes using fresh produce.	Processed foods – complex products, ingredients and technology
Consumers with only basic knowledge of food benefits.	Consumers more aware of link between diet, illness and health.
Personal responsibility for food selection and safety.	Demand for a regulated safe food and information.
Eating to sustain body function and enjoyment.	Eating to improve health and provide a quality of life.

FOOD SAFETY RESPONSIBILITY – EVERYONE’S A STAKEHOLDER!

FSANZ sets food standards for Australia and New Zealand that aim to -

- protect the health and safety of food consumers;
- ensure consumers are informed about the food they buy; and
- prevent deceptive and misleading conduct.

FSANZ food measures also aim to support an innovative food industry and ensure consistency with international obligations. Some current issues FSANZ are administering include -

- Health claims
- Fortification
- Country of origin labelling
- Standard development – ongoing
- Primary production and processing standards

Food regulation is a dynamic arena where food supply is become increasingly complex. There also seems to be an increase in public scrutiny regarding food safety and ingredient disclosure. This seems to be placing more demands on regulators to get it right and protect public health...*everyone is a stakeholder*

FSANZ welcomes public comment from industry, public health professionals, government agencies and consumers. Written submissions on many food issues and proposed changes to the *Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code* are regularly available for Local Government comment. The most recent item under consideration is the exemption of an allergen warning for isinglass (a processing aid commonly used in beer and wine). As a Local Government you may not wish to comment on this but there could be a local brewery with expertise and an interest in this area of food safety who could contribute and make a submission to FSANZ.

To access FSANZ food issues that are open for comment go to:

<http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/standardsdevelopment>

References:

1. Hall G & Kirk M 2005, Foodborne illness in Australia: annual incidence circa 2000, Canberra: Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing.
2. Hall G, Kirk MD, Becker N, Gregory JE, Unicomb L, Millard G, et al. Estimating foodborne gastroenteritis, Australia. *Emerg Infect Dis* [serial on the Internet]. 2005 Aug [date cited]. Accessed on 17.10.2008 from <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/EID/vol11no08/04-1367.htm>
3. Deon Mahoney 2006, Presentation: *Key Food Safety Legislation and Enforcement Practices in Australia*, Food Standards Australia New Zealand: Symposium 14 International Food Law. Accessed on 15.10.2008 from - http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/_srcfiles/IAFP%20SYMPOSIUM%2014%20Deon%20Mahoney.pdf

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