

# FOOD STANDARDS NEWS



The Newsletter of the Australia New Zealand Food Authority

February 2002



FROM THE  
MANAGING  
DIRECTOR'S  
DESK

## Food Standards Australia New Zealand

The year ahead is a challenging one for ANZFA, not the least because we expect to become Food Standards Australia New Zealand some time in the middle of the year – the precise timing will depend on completion of Treaty negotiations and the appointment of a new expanded Board of Directors.

Under the new legislation the Board will set food standards which must be consistent with policy guidelines set by the Food Standards Ministerial Council which will also have the authority to ask Food Standards Australia New Zealand to review standards which do not meet such guidelines. Food Standards Australia New Zealand will be required to retain key features of the ANZFA standards development processes, such as public consultation, openness and reliance on robust evidence and rigorous science.

Food Standards Australia New Zealand will also be taking on a wider whole-of-food chain approach through bringing together, for the first time, standards for primary production and processing with other links in the food chain. These new arrangements are also being currently finalised.

We will keep you informed about the exact date the change to Food Standards Australia New Zealand will be made. There is a more detailed article about the changes in this Food Standards News.

## New joint Food Standards Code

The new joint Food Standards Code is now more than half way through the two year transitional period before it becomes the sole food code for Australia and New Zealand. Many food manufacturers have already reviewed the composition and labels of their products to ensure they meet the new

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## ANZFA releases research on food handling practices in Australia

The Australia New Zealand Food Authority (ANZFA) has released a research report on food handling practices in Australian food businesses. The results of the *National Food Handling Benchmark Report* showed that businesses have started to use the better practices proposed in the new national food safety standards.

When releasing the report, ANZFA's Managing Director, Ian Lindenmayer, said that he was pleased that the majority of the food businesses surveyed, such as food manufacturers, food retailers, child care centres, schools, hospitals, cafés and restaurants, both knew about and are implementing safe food handling practices.

'Most significantly, food businesses with a food safety program in place scored better on food safety than those without. A food safety program sets out in writing how a business will

ensure that the food they sell is safe. With the exception of Victoria, these programs are voluntary at this stage, yet they make a considerable amount of business sense.

'Large businesses and those handling high risk foods, such as processed meats, poultry, seafood, egg and dairy dishes and prepared salads, were more likely than other businesses to have better knowledge of safe food handling practices and to be using them.

'However, it is disappointing that a small but significant proportion of businesses are not aware of the basics of food safety, such as the need to keep high risk food at the right temperature, to protect food from contamination, to clean and sanitise food preparation equipment properly, and to follow personal hygiene and illness management procedures.

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« ANZFA releases research on food handling practices in Australia cont...

'For example, over 20% of food businesses did not know the correct temperatures for storing chilled food or for holding hot food safely and a considerable number of food businesses used touch (43%) and/or sight (57%) to check food temperatures. It is also a matter of concern that many food businesses are not following proper personal hygiene practices to ensure the safety of their food, with 17% not having sufficient hand washing facilities, 7% with no soap or hand cleanser and 14% with no warm running water,' Mr Lindenmayer said.

To reduce the risks of producing food that is unsafe, the States and Territories are introducing three new national Food Safety Standards, developed by ANZFA, that require businesses to have safe food handling practices, premises and equipment and this helps ensure food produced in a business is safe for consumers. It is anticipated that these

standards will improve food safety practices in food businesses. This research was a benchmark study conducted prior to the implementation of the food safety standards. Results of future surveys will provide evidence of whether any improvement has occurred. ANZFA commissioned Campbell Research & Consulting to do this research as part of a new initiative to check the effectiveness of new food standards. ANZFA appreciates the assistance of local government officers with the survey.

'In a 1999 ANZFA report it was estimated that foodborne illnesses cost Australia \$2.6 billion each year and that Australians have a one in five chance of contracting food poisoning in any twelve month period. Australia is currently enhancing its surveillance of foodborne illnesses. This will provide better data on changes in the incidence of foodborne illness in Australia and the most likely causes.

'I am delighted that a large number of businesses are conscientious about food safety but am concerned that a significant

number don't have the required basic knowledge and are placing their customers at risk.

'ANZFA has also developed guidelines and fact sheets on the new Food Safety Standards, including translated fact sheets into fifteen languages. This information can be obtained from our website [www.anzfa.gov.au](http://www.anzfa.gov.au). The States and Territories have informed ANZFA that this research into food handling is a useful tool to assist them in implementing the food safety standards. I would like to commend the States and Territories for their hard work in assisting their local food businesses with these reforms through a variety of methods including seminars, visits and newsletters,' Mr Lindenmayer concluded.

A copy of the summary and full report is available on the ANZFA website <http://www.anzfa.gov.au/mediareleasespublications/publications/nationalfoodhandling1315.cfm>.

« From the MD's desk cont...

requirements. Incidentally, we are getting positive feedback from many parts of the community over the value of the additional information now becoming available on labels. I am told that many other food businesses have not yet begun that process. Those who leave it much later may find difficulty in getting new labels and packages redesigned and printed to meet the deadline, given that the Australian and New Zealand food packaging and labelling industry capacity is not unlimited.

During 2002, ANZFA will be continuing its work to finalise reviews of a number of old standards which were not reviewed in time for inclusion in the version of the joint Code adopted in late 2000. These include the review of infant formula, health claims, country of origin labelling and the regulation of dietary supplements.

### Food recalls

Some time ago, a publicist did an international comparison of national food recall numbers and said that the high number in Australia was an indication of poor safety standards. I believe this is patently ridiculous and contrary to other (more robustly based) comparisons. In fact, we consider the growth in recall numbers reflects the growing ability and willingness of the food industry to pick up food problems and organise a recall before it becomes a safety risk.

### Food emergencies

We have also begun this year with twelve cases of anthrax in Queensland cattle. I would like to reassure readers that anthrax is not a food safety issue. There are strict animal health, disease control and quarantine regulations in place to prevent the spread of anthrax to consumers through meat, offal or milk products. In fact, there is no record of anyone ever contracting anthrax in Australia through eating infected food.

There has been a report that, in experimental conditions, sheep can contract BSE (mad cow disease). We have been aware for some time that BSE can be experimentally transmitted to sheep, however sheep in Australia and New Zealand are not fed meat and bone meal and there has been no evidence to date of sheep contracting BSE overseas, other than through deliberate experimentation. ANZFA is in the process of completing a comprehensive assessment of the risk to public health resulting from exposure to the BSE agent via the food chain and the outcomes from this assessment will be used by the Australian Government to determine whether additional measures should be implemented.

### Food handling research

It is important to ANZFA not only institutes reform but also evaluates its success to assist us to identify any adjustments which experience shows to be needed. The December edition of Food Standards News

had an article on our evaluation strategy and the first research project, on food handling, had been completed. This research, intended to be a benchmark to evaluate the progress of the first three food safety standards, has shown that the majority of the food businesses surveyed, such as food manufacturers, food retailers, child care centres, schools, hospitals, cafés and restaurants, both knew about and are implementing safe food handling practices. Most significantly, food businesses with a food safety program in place scored better on food safety than those without.

However, it is disappointing that a small but significant proportion of businesses are not aware of the basics of food safety, such as the need to keep high risk food at the right temperature, to protect food from contamination, to clean and sanitise food preparation equipment properly, and to follow personal hygiene and illness management procedures. It makes good business sense for a food business to begin to adopt the new standards as soon as possible - not only to ensure they comply with their legal obligations, but also to protect their own reputation and their customer's health. There is considerable advice on how to do this on ANZFA's website or you can contact your local State or Territory jurisdiction for more information.

Ian Lindenmayer  
Managing Director

# The change to Food Standards Australia New Zealand

ANZFA is to change later this year. We will change our name to Food Standards Australia New Zealand; our Board membership will change; and so will the way that we develop standards. These changes to ANZFA are part of a broader package of reforms to the food regulatory system in Australia. This has been brought about by the signing of a new intergovernmental agreement on food, proposed changes to the Australian New Zealand Treaty and amendments to the Australia New Zealand Food Authority Act 1991.

The Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing is managing the implementation of these new regulatory arrangements.

The new arrangements will be implemented some time mid year 2002. While the new intergovernmental agreement between the Australian States and Territories has been signed and the legislation amended, revisions to the Treaty with New Zealand are not yet finalised. It is expected that this work will be completed by March 2002.

These reforms have been brought about as a result of a COAG decision following consideration of the Food Regulation Review (or Blair Report) that was presented to government in August 1998.

There are a number of ways in which the new food regulatory arrangements will affect ANZFA.

## Separation of policy from standards

One of the principal changes to the food regulatory system is the implementation of new arrangements for the development of policy guidelines to apply to food standards. Previously all policies were developed by the ANZFA Board, having regard to the broader policies and objectives of government. When the new system commences, the new Food Standards Ministerial Council will decide on policy guidelines based on advice from a new Standing Committee comprising senior government officials from the Commonwealth, New Zealand, the States and the Territories. The Department of Health and Ageing is consulting with stakeholders on new consultation arrangements for the new Ministerial Council and Standing Committee.

The new Ministerial Council has also established some other committees to assist in its tasks. Details of these are below.

Once the Ministerial Council has decided on policy guidelines, these will be published on the Food Standards Australia New Zealand website and Food Standards Australia New Zealand must have regard to these guidelines when it develops standards. When the Ministerial Council does this, it will not be required to consult on these guidelines, nor

consider their impacts, but will automatically implement them in its work. ANZFA is working with the Standing Committee to help clarify the distinction between policy guidelines and technical standards matters. This is not necessarily an easy process, but will be required to ensure optimal efficiency and effectiveness of the system.

## Coverage of the whole food supply chain

The new arrangements are also intended to bring together, for the first time, standards for the food manufacturing industry and standards for primary producers.

Arrangements are being developed to move responsibility for developing mandatory safety standards that apply to primary products to the new organisation and the new Ministerial Council.

There is an increasing interest in a number of primary industry sectors in developing new outcomes-based food safety standards, similar to those applying to the food manufacturing sectors. It is envisaged that such standards will be developed using the same consultative and scientifically robust processes that ANZFA employs to develop its other standards.

## Deciding on standards

Unlike ANZFA, Food Standards Australia New Zealand will have responsibility for deciding on a standard, but the Ministerial Council will still have the prerogative to seek a review of any such standard by Food Standards Australia New Zealand.

## Changes to the Board

The Board of Food Standards Australia New Zealand will increase from eight to twelve. (The current membership of eight is augmented by two special purpose members with limited terms to assist in the implementation of the joint Food Standards Code.) Members of the Board will be drawn from an expanded list of specialist areas – public health, food science, human nutrition, consumer affairs, food allergy, medical science, microbiology, food safety, biotechnology, veterinary science, primary food production, processed food production, food retailing, food service, small business, international trade, food regulation, consumer interests, the National Health and Medical Research Council (NH&MRC) and government.

The new arrangements for the Board include calling for nominations from prescribed organisations. The Department of Health and Ageing is implementing these new processes. The new Board will also be responsible for appointing the Managing Director of Food Standards Australia New Zealand.

## But some things won't change:

- Food Standards Australia New Zealand will still develop food standards for Australia and New Zealand.
- ANZFA staff will move over to the new organisation.
- Food Standards Australia New Zealand, will continue to work with its stakeholder groups to develop food standards for Australia and New Zealand.
- Food Standards Australia New Zealand can be contacted by mail or telephone using the using the same contact details as for ANZFA.
- Reflecting its name change, Food Standards Australia New Zealand will have a new web and email address; [www.foodstandards.gov.au](http://www.foodstandards.gov.au) and [www.foodstandards.govt.nz](http://www.foodstandards.govt.nz). Email addresses will be [firstname.lastname@foodstandards.gov.au](mailto:firstname.lastname@foodstandards.gov.au) (for staff in Australia) or [firstname.lastname@foodstandards.govt.nz](mailto:firstname.lastname@foodstandards.govt.nz) (for staff in New Zealand).
- The organisation will remain dedicated to improving its stakeholder interfaces and community involvement processes.
- In developing food standards, Food Standards Australia New Zealand will still be charged with the same statutory objectives:
  - To protect public health and safety;
  - To provide adequate information to consumers to enable consumer choice; and
  - To prevent misleading and deceptive conduct.

## Setting of food standards under the new system

The new food regulation arrangements described under the IGA outline a new decision making structure and processes. The other key bodies to be established under the proposed arrangements are:

**Australia New Zealand Food Regulation Ministerial Council (ANZFRMC)** - The Council will comprise Ministers representing Australian (Commonwealth and State/Territory) and New Zealand Governments. While the new Council will be based upon the existing Council, other portfolio Ministers with an interest in issues such as primary production, consumer affairs, food processing or trade will have the opportunity to participate in the Council with each jurisdiction confined to one vote. Health Ministers will be the lead Ministers from each jurisdiction.

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# ANZFA under the watchful eye of ACA

At a recent ANZFA Board meeting, Louise Sylvan, the Chief Executive of the Australian Consumers' Association (ACA) met with Board members to discuss various issues relating to ANZFA's consultation arrangements in standards development and decision-making processes.

The Australian Consumers' Association is an independent, not-for profit organisation. It is well known for the provision of information to consumers, and also advocates for the protection of consumers' rights and helps to create a strong voice for consumers in Australia.

Ms Sylvan acknowledged that ACA has been critical of ANZFA and its processes, and raised concerns that there had been insufficient focus on the needs and expectations of consumers in the development of food standards.

"ANZFA has not always been seen as a strong regulator, but rather the implementer of food standards driven by industry", said Ms Sylvan. "A precautionary approach has been absent in some of the most contentious areas of regulation – like the labelling of genetically modified foods where consumers demanded labelling and the ability to exercise choice in a free market."

Ms Sylvan continued, "We hope ANZFA will be more transparent and proactive, finding out

what the issues are for consumers, and addressing some of these in a positive way. There is also a need to build consumer confidence in our regulator and that requires an understanding that the public does not identify risk in the same way that scientists do – even the major trade agreements acknowledge that science is not the only appropriate criterion by which food standards are made. Public expectations are equally important."

ANZFA is moving to improve this situation by raising public awareness of the community consultation process and by providing greater opportunities for public comment for standards development. Information is available and accessible through the ANZFA website.

Other areas that ACA are most interested in are food irradiation, GM foods, country of origin labelling, unnecessary fortification of foods and health claims.



(Right to left) Ms Louise Sylvan, Chief Executive, ACA pictured with Mr Michael Mackellar, Chair of ANZFA Board and Professor Mark Wahlqvist, Board member.

« *The change to Food Standards Australia New Zealand cont...*

The primary role of the Council will be to establish the policy framework for the development of food standards for Australia and New Zealand by FSANZ. The Council will be chaired by the Commonwealth Minister for Health (or Parliamentary Secretary if delegated) with secretariat services provided by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing.

**Food Regulation Standing Committee (FRSC)** - FRSC comprises heads of Departments for which the respective members of the Ministerial Council have responsibility. The Standing Committee will provide advice to the Ministerial Council on the development of policy relating to the regulation of food. FRSC will be chaired by the Secretary of the Commonwealth Department of Health

and Ageing with secretariat services provided by the same department.

**Food Standards Development and Implementation Sub-Committee (DISC)** - DISC comprises heads of the existing Australian (Commonwealth and State/Territory) and New Zealand (as appropriate) inspection and enforcement agencies. Local government would also be represented through the Australian Local Government Association. Private sector agencies may also participate from time to time as appropriate.

DISC will be responsible for developing implementation policy and will oversee the development and implementation of a consistent approach across jurisdictions to enforcing food regulation and standards, regardless of whether food is sourced from domestic producers, export-registered establishments or from imports.

**Technical Advisory Group (TAG)** – TAG has been established to ensure appropriate technical input into a range of food regulation issues. These include:

- assisting in the co-ordination, surveillance and enforcement of the Food Standards Code (FSC);
- provision of technical advice on food regulatory measures;
- promotion of uniform interpretation and enforcement of the FSC; and
- sharing of information concerning technical aspects of food standards development and enforcement.

#### Further information

For additional information contact:

#### ANZFA

1. Information Officer
2. Strategic Development Program

Department of Health and Ageing  
Food Policy Unit

ANZFA's **Food Code Hotline** provides information on the new standards.  
Call **1 300 652 166** Australia (local call cost), **0 800 441 571** New Zealand  
Email: [advice@anzfa.gov.au](mailto:advice@anzfa.gov.au)

# Help for food businesses with the new Food Safety Standards

In August 2000, three new national Food Safety Standards were gazetted into the *Food Standards Code*. These were Standards 3.1.1 (*Interpretation and Application*), 3.2.2 (*Food Safety Practices and General Requirements*) and 3.2.3 (*Food Premises and Equipment*). However, before these standards can become enforceable, individual states and territories needed to make changes to their legislation. These standards are now law in four of the jurisdictions – NSW, Queensland, Tasmania and Victoria – and they should be in force in the remaining states and two territories by mid

## ANZFA Technical Paper Series

Following an ANZFA Board decision in 2001, ANZFA has released a series of technical reports which are used for the assessment of applications to change or develop food standards.

The Technical Report Series are scientific reports, based on current available scientific data, and relate to the issues of the safety of food additives, food contaminants, novel foods and foods produced using gene technology.

Presently, there are fourteen in the series with a number of other reports to be finalised this year. The topics include: Phomopins in Food, Pyrrolizidine Alkaloids in Food, Lupin Alkaloids in Food, Food Derived from High Oleic Acid Soy Bean Lines G94-1, G94-19 and G168, Food derived from Insect Protected Corn Line MON810, Food Derived from Glyphosate-Tolerant Cotton Line 1445, Food Derived from Glyphosate-tolerant Corn Line GA21, Food Derived from Glyphosate-tolerant Corn Line GT73, Food Produced from Insect-Protected Bt-176 Corn, Food Derived from Insect-Protected, Herbicide Tolerant Corn Bt-11, Food Derived from Insect-Protected (New leaf R) Potato Lines BT-06, ATBT-04, ATBT04-36, SPBT02-05, Food Derived from Insect and Potato Leafroll Virus Protected (New leaf R plus) Potato Lines RBMT21-129, RBMT21-350, RBMT22-83, Food Derived from Insect and Potato Virus Y-Protected (New Leaf R Y) Potato Lines RBMT15-101, SEMT15-02, SEMT15-16, and Shellfish Toxins in Food

Copies of these reports are available by contacting ANZFA's Information Officer on 02 6271 2241 or by email [info@anzfa.gov.au](mailto:info@anzfa.gov.au) or may be downloaded from the website site [www.anzfa.gov.au/mediareleasespublications/](http://www.anzfa.gov.au/mediareleasespublications/)

this year. When this occurs, for the first time, the same food safety standards will apply to every food business in Australia.

A fourth Standard, 3.2.1 (*Food Safety Programs*) was gazetted into the *Food Standards Code* in December 2000 but it does not yet apply to food businesses. In October 1999, the Health Ministers of Australia determined that further work should be undertaken on the costs and benefits of food safety programs, before consideration could be given to making them mandatory. The Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA) is coordinating this work and once completed, the Health Ministers will further consider the introduction of this Standard later this year. The State of Victoria is already requiring certain businesses to implement food safety programs. However, this has been mandated under separate legislation.

Collectively, the four Food Safety Standards are intended to provide a more effective regulatory system for ensuring the safety of food in Australia and therefore reduce the incidence of foodborne illness. This is achieved by placing more responsibility on the food business to make sure it handles food safely at every step of the business' operation – from the time the business receives food into its business until the final product is purchased.

A comprehensive support package is being finalised by ANZFA and DoHA to assist food businesses comply with the new Standards and the States and Territories enforce them. The materials support the food safety standards currently being implemented (Standards 3.1.1, 3.2.2 and 3.2.3) and Standard 3.2.1 (*Food Safety Programs*), in the event that it becomes mandatory. A great deal of guidance and assistance has been provided by state and territory health agencies in developing these materials.

### Materials to support Standards 3.1.1, 3.2.2 and 3.2.3

ANZFA has developed a wide range of materials to support these Standards. *Safe Food Australia* is a comprehensive guide to each of the requirements in the Standards. A series of fact sheets have been written to explain the Standards and the new requirements. The fact sheets on the new requirements have been translated into fifteen languages. Separate guides are also being finalised on temperature control, recall and the skills and knowledge requirement as well as a guide for charities and community groups.

DoHA is coordinating a number of projects to provide guidance to certain sectors of the food industry to comply with these standards. These include aboriginal community stores, businesses run by charitable and community groups and schools.

DoHA has also recently developed a training course for enforcement officers to promote the uniform interpretation and enforcement of these Standards.

### Materials to support Standard 3.2.1 (Food Safety Programs)

ANZFA has also developed a number of projects to assist with the implementation of Food Safety Programs. These include a paper outlining a national audit system to assist States and Territories develop their own audit system, a guide on the roles and responsibilities of auditors under the Model Food Act, and a national guide to the production of tools that can be used by businesses to develop food safety programs. ANZFA will also develop a guide to this Standard to assist enforcement officers and food businesses in its interpretation.

DoHA is coordinating a number of projects to assist businesses such as small retailers and the food services industry implement their own site-specific food safety programs with minimum cost and time. Specific sectors included within this project are restaurant and catering, childcare, nursing homes and hospitals.

Copies of the materials developed by ANZFA are available from the 'Recalls and safety' area of ANZFA's website.

## Food Surveillance Newsletter Summer edition

The *Food Surveillance Australia New Zealand Newsletter* (formerly known as *FoodWatch Australia New Zealand*) Summer 2002 edition is now available from the ANZFA website ([www.anzfa.gov.au](http://www.anzfa.gov.au)). The summer edition includes:

- items on the safety of sprouts and includes the WA sprout survey
- an update on the BSE Working Group
- survey reports on unpackaged ice (Queensland) and soy sauce/ chloropropanol survey (New Zealand)
- Food handling survey
- Recalls in Australia
- OzFoodNet.

# BSE in sheep is theoretically possible, but very unlikely

Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), a disease of cattle, is a transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE) and a prion disease. It belongs to the same group of diseases as scrapie in sheep. Scrapie has been present in sheep flocks around the world for many hundreds of years and has never been associated with disease in humans.

Strains of TSE agents can be identified by biological means and some ten or so strains of scrapie agent have been detected. Experimental results have shown that the BSE agent from infected cattle in the UK, Switzerland and France appears identical – and quite different from any of the strains of scrapie that have been identified.

On 10 January 2002 an article was published in *Nature* reporting on a study to evaluate the potential extent and pattern of spread of BSE in the United Kingdom sheep population – if BSE were to be present in sheep.

Scientists from Imperial College, London presented theoretical scenarios on the ongoing risk of people acquiring variant Creutzfeldt-Jacob Disease (vCJD) from consumption of sheep products based on the assumption that BSE had spread to British sheep flocks. This assumption was further used to compare the human exposure risk from consumption of sheep products compared to consumption of beef products.

The authors reported that the risk of acquiring vCJD from sheep could be negligible as there is no evidence to date that the BSE disease is present in sheep flocks anywhere in the world.

Unfortunately, some media reporting reflected a serious misunderstanding of the results of the study and this has led to some members of the public to hold fears about the safety of sheep meat, which are not supported by any available evidence. ANZFA is maintaining a close watch on emerging evidence and scientific analysis, but has yet to identify any evidence of BSE occurring in sheep anywhere in the world – other than where the disease has been transferred in tightly controlled scientific experiments.

Australia is widely considered to be free of sheep scrapie and has never had a case of BSE in cattle. From this perspective, domestically produced cattle, sheep and goat products present no risk of transmitting BSE to the consumer and are safe to eat.

In Australia, a new standard was introduced into the Food Standards Code on 18 July 2001 to manage the risk of human exposure to the BSE agent through consumption of beef and beef products. As there is yet no test for BSE in food, the new standard is implemented through a certification process that requires all countries to ensure that their beef products are free from BSE. Countries that have reported cases of BSE in their cattle herds are

unable to import beef products into Australia.

Although the New Zealand Government has developed its own standard and certification system for BSE, the administrative arrangements around these measures have been developed to ensure that the BSE systems for imported foods coming into both countries are largely harmonised.

ANZFA is in the process of completing a comprehensive assessment of the risk to public health resulting from exposure to the BSE agent via the food chain and the outcomes from this assessment will be used by the Australian Government to determine whether additional measures should be implemented.

Preliminary findings from ANZFA's risk assessment suggest that the current evidence cannot exclude the presence of BSE in sheep. Sheep may have been exposed to the same type of infected feed that was thought responsible for the BSE epidemic in cattle, and experimental data has shown that BSE can be transmitted to sheep via feed. Also the clinical signs of scrapie and experimentally produced BSE in sheep are similar, suggesting that the spread of the disease could have been masked in the United Kingdom.

More studies are required, and many more animals need to be screened for BSE, before definite statements can be made on whether BSE infection has spread to sheep and goats. This work, aimed at better characterising the presence and extent of TSEs (including BSE if present) in sheep and goats and the risk these may pose to human health, is being undertaken in the United Kingdom.

Although there are currently no human health controls on imported sheep products entering Australia, the majority of sheep-based food products are currently sourced from New Zealand and the United States. These countries have no reported cases of BSE in their cattle populations.

The small volume of imported sheep products imported from other countries are considered to pose a negligible risk of being contaminated with the BSE agent. It is also worth noting that as a precaution, certain sheep tissue considered to pose the highest risk of transmitting BSE through experimental studies, is already banned from the human food chain across the European Union.

ANZFA continues to monitor the available scientific information on the issue of whether BSE is present in sheep flocks of the United Kingdom and the potential for any public health risk and will take action immediately should any new threat to consumer safety emerge.

Dr Scott Crerar and Amanda Hill  
BSE Project Team, ANZFA

# ANZFA

Australia New Zealand Food Authority  
TE MANA WHAKARITE KAI MŌ WHITEREIRIA ME AOTEAROA

## What is ANZFA?

ANZFA's role is to protect the health and safety of people in Australia and New Zealand through the maintenance of a safe food supply.

ANZFA is a partnership between ten governments: the Federal, State and Territory governments of Australia and the New Zealand Government. It is a statutory authority under Australian Commonwealth law and an independent, expert body.

ANZFA is responsible for developing, varying and reviewing standards for food available in Australia and New Zealand and for a range of other functions including coordinating national food surveillance and recall systems, conducting research, assessing policies about imported food and developing codes of practice with industry.

ANZFA staff include toxicologists, microbiologists, food technologists, nutritionists and a range of professionals who provide legal, communications, policy and administrative advice.

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Call the **Food Code Hotline** for information on the new standards on **1 300 652 166** in Australia or **0 800 441 571** in New Zealand.  
Email: advice@anzfa.gov.au

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