

# FOOD STANDARDS NEWS



The Newsletter of the Australia New Zealand Food Authority

May 2002



FROM THE  
MANAGING  
DIRECTOR'S  
DESK

Last month, two food events hit the media, prompting me to once again speculate on the directions of food regulation.

The first concerned the news that a thirteen year old boy from New South Wales, with a history of allergic reactions to peanuts, had died after having an allergic reaction to peanut butter on a school camp. The second was a food poisoning outbreak in north Melbourne, causing more than 250 people to seek hospital attention.

Both events had tragic consequences; both exposed chinks in the safety of the food supply which, however small, need to be addressed. After all, ANZFA's primary responsibility is the development of food standards that protect public health and safety.

Minimum, effective regulation is good regulation – provided it genuinely is both effective and cost minimising. This is the policy of both the Australian and New Zealand governments and it is one that ANZFA has built into its processes and standards. In doing this, we recognise that there are vulnerable sectors of society, such as infants, the elderly and the immuno-compromised, and take steps to ensure that, in setting food standards, their special needs are met as well as those of the majority of the population.

This is why the new labelling regulations for food packages - due to come into force in December 2002 - not only spell out in greater detail the compositional and nutritional status of foods, but also strengthen the advisory statements that warn allergy sufferers of the presence of common allergens, such as nuts, eggs and milk.

This is why the Food Standards Council adopted the new standard Food Safety Programs in 2001 as a model for State and Territory legislation. Our estimates put the incidence of food poisoning in Australia at 11,500 cases a day, most of it unreported. The young and old are especially vulnerable to gastric illness. The sight of young children

*continued over* »



## Minister launches educational videos on food

On 27 March in Adelaide, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health and Ageing, Ms Trish Worth, launched two videos for schools on how to use the new information on food labels and how to choose a healthy eating plan.

The first video - 'Reading Food Labels' - is based on ANZFA's very popular poster explaining the new labelling requirements of the new joint Food Standards Code. Produced by the company Video Education Australasia, the video was developed in conjunction with ANZFA, nutritionists and food industry members.

It covers the new food labelling laws step by step, such as the percentage of the main ingredient and important health information on food components or ingredients that can cause adverse reactions, and includes consumer information about food recalls.

ANZFA's food labelling poster is being sent out with the video as part of a broader education strategy.

The second video - 'The Healthy Eating Pyramid' - was produced by the same company in association with Nutrition Australia. It gives practical suggestions on healthy eating based on the Healthy Eating Pyramid, a model developed by Nutrition Australia.

The Healthy Eating Pyramid has been used as an educational tool for more than 20 years and it continues to be in great demand by publishers, educators, health workers and the general public. While it is not the only model in use, the Healthy Eating Pyramid has been developed as a simple, conceptual model for people to use as a first step to adequate nutrition.

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## Monitoring foodborne disease in Australia: OzFoodNet

In 2000, the Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA), in conjunction with State and Territory health departments, established OzFoodNet, a collaborative network for enhancing the surveillance of foodborne disease in Australia. The network includes state and territory health departments, federal government agencies, public health laboratories and academia.

Utilising funds provided by DoHA, ANZFA employs the coordinating epidemiologist, Martyn Kirk, and a data manager, both based in Melbourne.

As part of OzFoodNet, six states and one territory have employed dedicated epidemiologists to enhance surveillance for diseases transmitted by food. During the first quarter of 2002, OzFoodNet epidemiologists established important applied research studies into common foodborne diseases, and analysed and disseminated data on foodborne diseases across Australia.

Several of these applied research studies are currently underway, including a national survey

of the prevalence of gastroenteritis, case control studies of campylobacter and salmonella infections and a comparison of molecular methods for campylobacter typing.

The National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health is conducting the national survey of gastroenteritis, which has collected seven months' of data. The survey shows that approximately 12% of people report experiencing gastroenteritis in the previous month. These data will be critical for assessing the burden of diseases due to food.

OzFoodNet also started a case control study of *Salmonella enteritidis* to determine risk factors for acquiring this infection. The study showed that the majority of cases of *S. enteritidis* have been acquired overseas.

One of the major benefits of OzFoodNet has been the increased communication and capacity to investigate foodborne disease. OzFoodNet epidemiologists compile and circulate a fortnightly report of clusters of

foodborne diseases occurring in their respective jurisdictions. This has proven useful to identify common themes occurring in multiple jurisdictions.

They also discuss surveillance and control activities at monthly teleconferences and three-monthly face-to-face meetings. OzFoodNet is a member of the Communicable Diseases Network of Australia (CDNA), which oversees communicable disease control in Australia.

During the first quarter of 2002, CDNA asked OzFoodNet to coordinate an investigation into an outbreak of *Salmonella typhimurium* 170 occurring in three different Australian states. This investigation did not identify a transmission vehicle, but did reveal important issues for foodborne disease surveillance in Australia. In particular, it highlighted the need for better information about sources of salmonella from foods, animals and the environment.

## Food poisoning outbreak hits Melbourne

At least 272 people were treated at Melbourne hospitals and medical centres for abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhoea on 25 March 2002.

Symptoms first started appearing within a few hours of people having lunch at a festival at an Islamic centre in the Melbourne suburb of Fawkner. A meal of rice, lamb and potatoes was served at the function which attracted about 600 people.

The Victorian Department of Human Services quickly began preliminary investigations as to the cause of the outbreak and established a hotline for anyone who was affected, and to assist in collecting left-over food taken home from the festival.

Victoria's acting Chief Health Officer, Dr John Carnie, kept the public informed of developments through the media. Dr Carnie has confirmed that the food poisoning outbreak was caused by *Bacillus cereus* and *Staphylococcus* bacteria.

"Laboratory tests have shown the presence of these bacteria in food samples taken from the event. Proper handling and storage of food prepared at the centre would have prevented this outbreak," he said.

Food eaten by people at the festival was provided by volunteers, not professional caterers. Because the food was not sold, its handling was not subject to the food

registration requirements of State legislation. However, anyone providing food should ensure that food hygiene, handling and safety standards are complied with.

In particular, hot food need to be kept hot and cold food needs to be kept cold.

ANZFA has developed, with the assistance of the States and Territories, a series of food safety fact sheets for charitable and community groups to assist them to meet their obligation to distribute food that is safe. They include information on keeping food at safe temperatures and how to prepare and cook food safely. These fact sheets are available on the ANZFA website.

« From the MD's desk cont...

being wheeled into a hospital on a stretcher is not a pleasant one.

ANZFA remains convinced that mandatory Food Safety Programs can greatly reduce the threat of foodborne illness to the Australian population.

On the issue of peanut allergenicity, we could regulate for all peanut products to be taken off the market. That would solve the problem, but deny our population a food which is valued and safe to the overwhelming majority. Similarly, we could require the microbiological testing of all batches of food before they are consumed. This would be vastly expensive

and inflate food prices to an unjustifiable extent and make many foods unaffordable to many people.

ANZFA's challenge, therefore, is to develop standards to allow the management of food hazards at a level commensurate with the actual risk. And the risk management strategy must take due account of the need to keep a wide diversity of foods affordable to all and the fact that good clear label information can often be a superior alternative to bans and extensive testing requirements.

ANZFA's staff grapple with these issues on a daily basis.

### Professor John Catford

I must pay tribute to Professor John Catford, who resigned from the ANZFA Board on 4 January this year. He was appointed to the Board for a three-year term on 25 May 1998 as the member representing State and Territory public health authorities. Professor Catford had been Director of Public Health and Chief Health Officer in Victoria and resigned to take up a new appointment in the faculty of Health and Behavioural Sciences at Deakin University.

His wise counsel is missed by all of his former colleagues on the Board.

Ian Lindenmayer  
Managing Director

# Nutrition Panel Calculator available again

On 19 April, the Nutrition Panel Calculator (NPC) was again made available via the ANZFA website ([www.anzfa.gov.au](http://www.anzfa.gov.au)), after being off-line for maintenance purposes since mid-March.

The NPC has been designed to assist food manufacturers and retailers derive average nutrient quantities for the purposes of nutrition labelling. It contains information on the quantities of each of the seven nutrients (energy, protein, fat, saturated fat, carbohydrate, sugars and sodium) that must be included in nutrition information panels, where these panels are required, and uses Australian food composition data.

ANZFA apologises for the problems with availability of the NPC since its launch late last year. In part, delays have been due to technical problems which are all too common in new IT services. We recognise the value to companies of ready access to the NPC and are continuing to do all we can to maintain this service.

Some of the access problems have simply been the result of heavy demand, particularly during working hours and we are expecting even heavier usage of the NPC in the coming months. If you do experience any delays in accessing it, please try again outside of normal office hours.

Please do not hesitate to contact us at [npc@anzfa.gov.au](mailto:npc@anzfa.gov.au) if you have any queries about the NPC.

« *Minister launches educational videos on food cont...*

Ms Worth said the Pyramid featured in the video was but one example of a number of models available to promote healthy eating messages that are consistent with Australian dietary guidelines.

'Another is the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating, developed for the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing as a national food selection guide,' Ms Worth said.

'This guide has a number of components, including consumer and educator resource kits. The full range of the resources that make up the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating are available from the Department through its website at [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au).'

Copies of the videos can be purchased from Video Education Australasia on 1800 034 282 or through its website at [www.vea.com.au](http://www.vea.com.au). Copies of the education poster can be found on the ANZFA website at [www.anzfa.gov.au](http://www.anzfa.gov.au) or [www.anzfa.govt.nz](http://www.anzfa.govt.nz).

## The change to FSANZ: what will happen to existing Applications?

In the middle of this year, ANZFA will become Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ). The change from ANZFA to FSANZ is part of a broader package of reforms to the food regulatory system in Australia.

It is expected that the new arrangements for FSANZ will come into force on 1 July 2002, although this is not yet definite. The date depends on a finalisation of amendments to the Treaty between Australia and New Zealand, amongst other things.

On the day that FSANZ starts up, a new Act (*Food Standards Australia New Zealand 1991*) will come into force. This new Act contains a number of transition arrangements, including for treatment of Applications and Proposals. Anyone interested in a more detailed explanation of these transition arrangements for Applications should refer to our fact sheet at [www.anzfa.gov.au](http://www.anzfa.gov.au) and click on Media Releases & Publications.

These particular transition arrangements will apply where an Application has been commenced by ANZFA but where, by the start up of FSANZ, the Application has not been finalised.

Although the legislation makes some changes to the processes and responsibilities relating to both Applications (from outside bodies) and Proposals (generated by ANZFA/FSANZ) to change food standards, the broad nature of the process is essentially the same, including the high level of consultation and the use in most cases of three levels of assessment.

In short, under the new arrangements Applications will be deemed to have reached the equivalent stage under FSANZ processes as they had reached under ANZFA processes and will proceed accordingly.

For Applications at Full (Draft) Assessment and Inquiry (Final Assessment), FSANZ must review the assessment reports having regard to submissions previously not considered and any written policy guidelines formulated by Ministers and notified to FSANZ. At this stage, no policy guidelines have been finalised by Ministers, although work is well advanced on a policy relating to health claims.

In addition, the statutory timeframe for Applications that fall within this category will be extended from 12 to 15 months. Any submissions made to ANZFA in relation to these Applications will still be considered by FSANZ.

## News from the Food Safety Information Council (FSIC)

The 2002 Food Safety Campaign (including Food Safety Week in November) will have the theme Food Safety for School Age Children. The campaign will highlight simple issues like hand-washing for primary school children and will broaden to include food safety messages relating to lunchboxes and food preparation for parents and high school students.

The campaign will link in with the Queensland Food Safety Matters Schools Kit which is expected to be ready to go by the end of June.

The theme was decided at the FSIC Annual General Meeting in March. A new structure for the Council led to a Board of Management and a Campaign Executive being elected.

### Members of the Campaign Executive are:

Chairperson — Barry Shay (SafeFood NSW)

Vice Chairperson — Kerry Bell (Queensland Dept of Health)

Chairperson of Finance Committee/Treasurer/Public Officer — Jacquie Krassie (Dietitians Association Of Australia)

Chairperson of Technical Committee — Brigitte Cox (Food Science Australia)

Chairperson of Public Relations Committee — Lydia Buchtmann (ANZFA)

Other Representatives —

Bronwyn Capanna (Australian Consumer Speciality Products Assoc)

Anna Greco (Australian Food & Grocery Council)

### Members of the Board of Management are:

All members of the Campaign Executive, together with:

Ian McKay (Commonwealth Dept of Health & Ageing)

Tracy Ward (Northern Territory Health Dept)

Kim Leighton (Western Australia Dept of Health)

Dan Rotman (Victoria Health Dept)

Eric Johnson (Tasmania Health Dept)

### Keep watching Food Standards News for updates on the campaign.

For more information contact:

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## 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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ISSN 1440-8058

## Chief Scientist Dr Marion Healy looks at the concept of 'equivalence'

The increased emphasis on outcome-based approaches to ensuring the safety of the food supply recognises that different processes and procedures may be used to effectively control food hazards. However, there is currently no agreed framework or criteria to determine if various processes/procedures result in the same or 'equivalent' outcomes.

ANZFA has been developing a framework and procedures for determining if different hazard control processes result in equivalent food safety outcomes. The objective is to determine if alternative hazard control processes, when applied to a specified food, achieve the same level of food safety as that achieved using standard/traditional hazard control measures.

The framework for making equivalence determinations and the type of information that may be required by ANZFA to make the determination are now outlined in a guideline document. The decision-making framework is intended to apply to a wide range of foods, without limiting the type of hazard that may be relevant to the food under consideration. Although the guidelines have a strong emphasis on addressing microbial hazards in food, the framework outlined in these guidelines could be applied to other food borne hazards.

The determination of equivalence is essentially a risk and evidence based process that is part of the overall risk analysis framework. The determination establishes a strong scientific basis for the equivalence determination by taking into account the current state of scientific and technical knowledge.

Before an equivalence determination can be made, both the scope of the determination, and the appropriate benchmark for food safety must be defined. The benchmark for food safety will be based on the level of safety achieved by the standard/traditional hazard

control measures. The first element of the equivalence determination is to identify and characterise the relevant hazards associated with the food and the food production environment. In some cases consumer exposure to the hazards through dietary intake may need to be assessed.

The impact of the hazard control measures on each of the identified hazards and consequent impact on food safety is then assessed. The extent of hazard reduction (and level of food safety) achieved is then compared to the outcome of the standard/traditional hazard control measures. As the hazard control measures are undertaken within an existing regulatory framework, relevant elements of the supporting infrastructure need to be considered. This might include regulatory requirements, audit programs, validation of hazard control procedures and monitoring and surveillance programs.

Different hazard control measures will only be determined as being equivalent if they can be demonstrated to achieve similar levels of food safety consistently. Thus the determination will require sufficient scientific and technical information to permit an objective determination. If recognition of the equivalence outcome requires a change to the *Food Standards Code*, ANZFA's statutory process must also be followed.

ANZFA is now requesting comment on the feasibility of applying the determination procedures, the appropriateness of the information requirements and the clarity of the guidelines. The guidelines are supported by a discussion paper which outlines the rationale for the equivalence decision-making framework and information on the context in which the framework and procedures were developed. Both documents are available on ANZFA's web site at [www.anzfa.gov.au](http://www.anzfa.gov.au) or [www.anzfa.govt.nz](http://www.anzfa.govt.nz).

in between editions. Both will be provided free of charge.

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