

FOOD STANDARDS NEWS



The Newsletter of Food Standards Australia New Zealand

Autumn 2006

FROM THE CEO

Last month, I gave presentations to community and government groups in Western Australia and in Wellington, New Zealand. It was gratifying to see the obvious interest in food regulatory matters by a wide range of industry and consumer interests.

In these talks, I stressed the need for FSANZ to pay special attention to three factors in the next twelve months – ‘certainty’, ‘timeliness’ and ‘confidence’ – as we address a food supply that is becoming increasingly complex.

Our regulatory goalposts need to be well signposted - they are there for a purpose. We should always be mindful of the impacts and costs to governments, industry and the broader community. Finally and importantly, the rules of the game should be applied consistently – and with all of this in place, I am confident industry will continue to be a willing partner in the regulatory process.

In other words, there needs to be a ‘certainty’ of process. This involves an evidence-based approach to decision making by FSANZ, known and transparent operating systems and an open-door policy that encourages, for example, pre-application discussions between food manufacturers and us.



FSANZ Chief Executive Officer Graham Peachey

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The Hon Christopher Pyne, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health and Ageing (left), with Bill Zaharis from Seven Brothers at the launch of the country of origin labelling user guide at Adelaide Central Market.

New Guide Launched to Country of Origin Food Labelling

Christopher Pyne, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health and Ageing, launched a new user guide on country of origin labelling at the Adelaide Central Market on 9 March 2006.

“This new user guide has been designed by FSANZ to help food retailers and businesses, especially small businesses like fruit and veggie shops and butchers, to understand the new country-of-origin labelling standard,” Mr Pyne said.

“From 8 June – which is only three months away – all unpackaged fresh and processed fruit, vegetables, nuts and seafood must say which country they come from, including Australia.

“From December this year unpackaged fresh and processed pork products must also be labelled with their country of origin, and the changes to packaged foods must be completed by December 2007.

“The new country-of-origin labelling standard has been endorsed by the Australia and New Zealand Food Regulation Ministerial Council, which I chair.

“I urge all state and territory agencies

responsible for food to ensure that their local food businesses and retailers are aware of these new requirements, and to fully enforce the Food Standards Code, including this new standard.”

When the ministerial council agreed to the new standard in October 2005, the Australian Government directed FSANZ to assess the merit of extending country-of-origin labelling to two or less fruit or vegetable whole-food components packaged together, including where other incidental ingredients were included.

FSANZ was seeking public comment on the feasibility of doing this before reporting to the Australian Government later this month, Mr Pyne said.

“FSANZ is also preparing information to help consumers to understand the new country-of-origin labelling when it starts to come into force in June,” he said.

The new Country of Origin Labelling of Food Guide to Standard is available on the FSANZ website at http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/srcfiles/CoOL_1st%20Edn-PRINT_with_cover.pdf

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Certainty also involves 'timeliness' in standard setting. We are aware that in recent times we have not fully met stakeholder expectations in this regard. And there are good reasons for this – some related to the fact that we are a 'demand driven' agency, required to accept all approaches to address variations to the Food Standards Code.

Some of it is related to that fact that we are grappling with the 'big issues' left over from the review of the Code that was undertaken a few years ago – and they include health claims, fortification, country of origin, and others.

A recent review of our legislative processes by the Food Regulation Standing Committee has given support to internal administrative initiatives that we are already implementing. Consultations are occurring on possible legislative changes to our Act – all of which will contribute to achieving some of our efficiency goals.

It is clear that a 'one size fits all' approach to standard setting does not work. We intend to become more flexible in the way we go about our business, but this will not be at the expense of certainty.

By taking these and other steps, we aim to strengthen stakeholder 'confidence' in a food regulatory system that is objective, not arbitrary, and has the interests of the Australian and New Zealand people as its primary concern.

And this is the bottom line for us at FSANZ – confidence in the system.

We are committed to working with our partners in the regulatory arrangements to achieve the highest level of public confidence possible in the food regulatory process. With your help and involvement we will achieve our goals.

Graham Peachey

FSANZ General Counsel receives Australia Day Medallion

John Fladun, FSANZ's General Counsel, received recognition for his contribution to FSANZ by being awarded an Australia Day Achievement Medallion on Australia Day in January 2006. John, who many of you will know, has been with FSANZ since 1997. The medallions are provided to agencies by the National Australia Day Council.

APEC Food Safety Cooperation Workshop

FSANZ is taking the lead among Australian Government agencies to promote an APEC Food Safety Cooperation Initiative for the Asia-Pacific region. Most recently, FSANZ organised a workshop to progress this initiative that was co-chaired by Australia and China on 21 February 2006 in Hanoi, Vietnam. The workshop discussed the information provided by Member Economies on the stock take of current food safety and related activities within APEC, international and regional organisations. Participants also agreed to share information and identify capacity building needs across APEC Member Economies.

The major outcomes of the workshop were:

- that Member Economies would refer the broad themes from the needs analysis, and the practical measures for implementation to their technical experts and report back to Australia and China;
- further refinement of the themes and practical measures arising from the needs analysis, to be considered at a workshop in Vietnam in September 2006; and



FSANZ Chief Executive Officer Graham Peachey (left) and Mr Bi Kexin

- to keep other APEC Committees, such as the Agricultural Technical Cooperation Working Group, the APEC Business Advisory Council and the Fisheries Working Group, informed of the progress of the Food Safety Cooperation Initiative.

The APEC Sub-Committee on Standards and Conformance endorsed these outcomes.

Update on Health Claims

The Draft Assessment Report for the proposal on nutrition, health and related claims was released on 26 November 2005 for public comment and closed on 31 March 2006. This is the first time such a comprehensive review of nutrition claims has been conducted and an integrated strategy for both nutrition claims and health claims presented in the one document. Thank you to all the people who took time to make a submission on this important issue.

Extensive public stakeholder briefings and targeted consultations have been held, in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane, Auckland and Wellington to date, to provide general overviews or discuss particular aspects of the proposals with a variety of audiences.

We anticipate that the final assessment and proposed Standard will be notified to the Ministerial Council in the third quarter of 2006.

There has been considerable media interest in this work. One area that got particular media attention was around the new standard purportedly preventing fresh fruit from carrying health claims because of its high sugar level. FSANZ does not intend any prohibition on dietary advice (such as "Eat at least five servings per day; at least 3 servings of vegetables and at least 2 servings of fruits")

nor does the proposed standard place any restrictions on the provision of dietary advice about the health benefits of eating fruit and vegetables. However, to ensure that health claims are not made on less nutritious foods, upper levels have been set for sugar, saturated fat and salt.

FSANZ's intent is to allow health claims on beneficial nutritious foods such as fruit and vegetables consistent with national nutritional guidelines, however, there are difficulties in drawing the lines between fruit and vegetables, for example foods and other foods that may be considered to be inappropriate to carry health claims.

Although feedback to date from stakeholders has been largely positive, some areas of the draft standard have been identified as requiring refinement. Broadly speaking, industry has indicated that some elements are too restrictive, while public health interests suggest that these elements need to be more restrictive. FSANZ is working closely with health professionals, industry and consumer representatives, and the jurisdictions to achieve sensible results, and anticipates a significant number of detailed submissions will inform the finalisation of the standard. If necessary, FSANZ will also commission further research to support the evidence base for the decisions made.

FSANZ and Standards Australia to Work Closer Together

Standards Australia and Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) have signed a memorandum of understanding to work closer in developing food standards in Australia. Mr Graham Peachey, Chief Executive Officer of FSANZ and Mr John Tucker, Chief Executive Officer of Standards Australia signed the memorandum of understanding.

Mr Peachey said, at the signing ceremony in Canberra on 17 March 2006, that work in food standards setting sometimes overlapped the broader standards work of Standards Australia.

"We've seen some important collaborative work in the last 12 months between the two organisations.

"An example of this is the standardisation of fish naming, although it was not a food safety issue both FSANZ and Standards Australia worked closely with the seafood industry to finalise a general standard for uniform fish names in 2006. This standard will ensure the seafood industry uses standard names for fish, which often vary from state to state, and it will help prevent consumer confusion.

"Consumers and organic growers are also interested in uniform accreditation for organic food. Once again, this isn't a safety issue for

inclusion in the Food Standards Code but it is under consideration as a future Australian Standard on organics and biodynamic produce by Standards Australia," Mr Peachey said.

Mr Tucker said the agreement builds on the positive relationship Standards Australia has shared with FSANZ over many years.

"This is an important agreement that will strengthen ties between the peak food standards developers in Australia and will lead to the development of integrated food standards.

"This is an example of the closer stakeholder relations that we will be establishing in many fields under our new business model."

Under the memorandum of understanding the two organisations will:

- work together on standard setting and other joint activities;

- provide expertise on each other's technical committees.;
- work together to ensure there is no overlap between the work of the two agencies; and
- share information related to food industry and consumers needs.



Mr Graham Peachey, Chief Executive Officer of FSANZ and Mr John Tucker, Chief Executive Officer of Standards Australia at the signing of the memorandum of understanding.

Responding to a National Food Safety Incident

FSANZ and the NSW Food Authority convened a workshop on 24 February 2006 in Sydney to develop a coordinated approach between the Australian states and territories to national food safety incidents. The meeting was addressed by Scott Milne from Emergency Management Australia, Dr Gardner Murray, the Australian Government's Chief Veterinary Officer, George Davey CEO of the NSW Food Authority, Kerry Bell from Safe Food Queensland and Cath Halbert the acting Head of the Office of Health Protection in the Department of Health and Ageing. Sessions were held on determining a food safety incident; roles, responsibilities and coordination; risk assessment; risk management; and risk communication. A National Food Safety Incident Response Protocol is now being developed for approval by the Implementation Subcommittee of the Food Regulation Steering Committee.



Workshop participants

Primary Production and Processing Standard for Milk Update

FSANZ has finalised the Draft Assessment Report for its national milk Primary Production and Processing Standard (Proposal P296). There are specific requirements in the draft Primary Production and Processing Standard for Milk to ensure the safety of on-farm milk production activities including the collection and bulk transport of milk and milk products, as well as milk processing activities. These requirements are based on a scientific analysis of the hazards and risks to human health at critical points in the milk supply chain.

As part of the Draft Assessment process, FSANZ undertook a rigorous scientific analysis of current practices within the Australian dairy industry. This assessment concluded that the current management practices support the production of dairy products with a high standard of public health and safety. The draft Standard consolidates existing regulatory measures into a national standard, achieving uniform food safety requirements across Australia.

FSANZ is currently seeking comment on the scope and content of the proposed Primary Production and Processing Standard for Milk. The Draft Assessment Report for Proposal P296 was released for public consultation on the 22 March 2006 with a closing date for submissions the 3 May 2006.

Phase Two of this project is to investigate regulatory options for raw milk products.

Updated timetable for fortifying food with iodine and folic acid

Two of the key priorities for FSANZ in 2006 are finalising the two proposals for the mandatory fortification of the food supply with folic acid and with iodine. We have already been out for one round of public comment on both these important public health issues. We will be seeking comment on the draft assessment report for folic acid mandatory fortification in June this year and finalising the standard in August 2006 rather than at the end of 2006. The draft assessment report for iodine mandatory fortification will be out for public comment in July 2006 and the standard finalised in October 2006.

Note that once any new standard is finalised, the Australia and New Zealand Food Regulation Ministerial Council is to be notified and they have up to 60 days to seek a review. If they don't seek a review the standards can be gazetted into the Food Standards Code. If there are any major changes to the Food Standards Code there will be a period to allow the food industry to prepare for any new requirements.]

Folic acid

Mandatory folic acid fortification of food is being considered to reduce the rates of neural tube defects in babies. Neural tube defects, such as spina bifida, are severe congenital malformations of the central nervous system caused by the failure of the neural tube to close while the embryo is developing in the early stages of pregnancy. While not all neural tube defects can be prevented, there is convincing scientific evidence that shows that some cases, but not all, neural tube defects can be prevented if women consume at least 400 micrograms of folic acid a day.

Over the past ten years, there have been a number of strategies to increase the folic acid intake of women of childbearing age. These have included health promotion and education, the use of a folate/neural tube defects health claim, providing voluntary folic acid fortification permissions for foods such as breakfast cereals and bread, and policies promoting the intake of folic acid supplements. Despite these strategies, most women of childbearing age are still not consuming enough folic acid.

National and international experience indicates that voluntary fortification has not been able to deliver the necessary increases in folic acid intakes - nor are all pregnancies planned

FSANZ recently completed a preliminary assessment of the major risks and benefits from increasing folic acid intakes. This important work will underpin the development of strategies in considering folic acid fortification. We are also carrying out extensive dietary modelling, using newly revised collected folic acid nutrient data, to help identify the most appropriate food to fortify (known as the food vehicle) as well as

appropriate levels of fortification. An external Folic Acid Scientific Advisory Group met in late March to provide further expert advice on the health benefits and risks from increased folic acid intakes.

In addition to the information we received during the round of public comment on the initial assessments, we will consider consumer research on how the community perceives fortified foods and we will undertake targeted consultation with a wide range of key stakeholders. We have also commissioned independent expertise to undertake a cost/benefit analysis of the regulatory options.

FSANZ will then draw together all the relevant information gained from these activities to determine the preferred regulatory option. This will be outlined in a draft assessment report that will be available for public consultation in June 2006.

Iodine

We are also assessing mandatory iodine fortification as a possible strategy improve iodine intakes in Australia and New Zealand. Several studies have shown the re-emergence of mild to moderate iodine deficiency in school children, adults and pregnant women in parts of Tasmania, Victoria, NSW and New Zealand.

Recently published data from the Australian National Iodine Nutrition Study further confirms inadequate iodine intakes in South-eastern

Australia. This study is the largest of its kind ever undertaken in Australia, involving 1700 children from 88 schools across five states.

A diet deficient in iodine is associated with a wide range of adverse health effects, with the developing foetus, babies and young children being at greatest risk. The most damaging effect of iodine deficiency is on the developing brain, especially during the foetal and neonatal periods. Mild iodine deficiency can cause subtle deficits in visual motor skills, hearing and intelligence. These adverse effects are irreversible and can be made worse by continued iodine deficiency during infancy and toddler-hood.

FSANZ is examining the most effective food regulatory option to increase the iodine content of the food supply. As part of the development of a standard we have convened an external Iodine Scientific Advisory Group, which met in early March 2006. As in the folic acid project, we are also undertaking extensive dietary modelling as well as commissioning a cost/benefit analysis and consumer research.

FSANZ will draw together all the relevant information gained from these activities to determine a preferred regulatory option. This will be outlined in a draft assessment report that will be available for public consultation in July 2006.



Back row: Ms Carole Gibb, Ms Ingrid Coles, Dr Bob Boyd, Prof Murray Skeaff, Mr Derek Castles, Prof Tim Williamson, Prof Carol Bower, Dr Mark Lucock
Front: Dr Fiona Cumming, Ms Bonnie Field, Dr Vicki Flood, Ms Janine Lewis, Ms Bronwyn Dixon

Improving the FSANZ website

We are currently improving our website to make sure the information you need is available and easy to find. Thank you to everyone who responded to our recent website survey. We will use this information to make improvements to the website, especially to improve its search function. The revamped website, with an easy to use guide, will be available in July 2006.

Food in the news

Welcome to a new regular feature about what food issues have been in the news recently. If you'd like to be kept up to date subscribe on our website to the Food Standards News and Food Standards Update Service <http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/mediareleasepublications/information-service.cfm>.

Benzene in soft drinks

There have been reports overseas that low levels of benzene have been found in some soft drinks and juices. It is thought that this can occur from a reaction between the approved food additive sodium benzoate and the added ascorbic acid (vitamin C). The benzene levels found overseas are well below the WHO limits for benzene in drinking water.

FSANZ is working closely with the Australian states and territories and the New Zealand Food Safety Authority to survey Australian and New Zealand soft drink and juice products that have benzoates and ascorbic acid as ingredients to see if there are similar findings here. We will then see if there is a safety issue and, if necessary, work with the beverage industry to remedy it. In the meantime, FSANZ's advice is that soft drinks and juices can still be consumed in line with current dietary advice, that is as part of a balanced diet and in moderation.

The safety of imported food

Channel 7's Today Tonight program in Australia has been reporting that imported fish is unsafe. This isn't correct as both imported and locally produced foods have to comply with the Food Standards Code. Surveys published in Food Surveillance News regularly show that imported fruit, vegetables and seafood are as safe as local products. Food Surveillance News also regularly reports on findings from the imported food inspection

program. For the latest edition see <http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/mediareleasepublications/foodsurveillancenewsletter/index.cfm>

Trans fatty acid labelling

Currently, in Australia, the trans fatty acids in food only have to be labelling if the manufacturer makes a nutrition claim about cholesterol, saturated, unsaturated or trans fatty acids. However, voluntary labelling is permitted and many edible oil spread manufacturers in Australia and New Zealand have chosen to voluntarily label their products.

There are two main groups of fatty acids, saturated and unsaturated fatty acids. Trans fatty acids are a type of unsaturated fatty acid that can impact on health by adversely affecting cholesterol levels. Low levels of trans fatty acids occur naturally in the fat of dairy products and meat as they are formed within the gut of ruminant animals, such as cows and sheep.

Trans fatty acids are also formed during industrial processing or superheating of vegetable oils and fats – for example, in the chemical process of making semi-solid fats from liquid polyunsaturated fatty acids – called partial hydrogenation for use as edible oil spreads, margarine or as shortening for baking.

Some concerns exist about the potential health effects of trans fats particularly those that are derived from partial hydrogenation of vegetable oils, although there is no convincing scientific evidence to date. Many countries, including the United States, Canada and some European countries, have either placed limits on the permissions for trans fats in processed foods or more commonly, mandated labelling requirements for trans fats in foods.

FSANZ is currently examining whether trans fatty acids should be labelled in Australia and

New Zealand. As part of this work, we are carrying out a survey with the Australian states and territories and the New Zealand Food Safety Authority to determine the level of trans fats in Australian and New Zealand foods. It is possible that there may not be high levels of trans fatty acids in our foods. The final results will be available in the next few months.

Registration on the Food Regulation Secretariat database

Under current food regulation arrangements, policy guidance is agreed by the Ministerial Council. That policy is then used by FSANZ to guide the development of food standards. Effective consultation is a key feature of the food regulatory system.

If you would like to receive information such as Ministerial Council Communiqués, notice of Policy Options Consultation papers or the Food Regulation Secretariat's newsletter, please register on the Food Regulation Secretariat's database at www.health.gov.au/foodsecretariat

Please note that if you are on FSANZ's database, you are not automatically on the Food Regulation Secretariat's database.

For further information please contact Tania Ruitenbergh, Food Regulation Secretariat, Department of Health and Ageing on Ph: 02 6289 5128

Stakeholder Forum

The FSANZ Board met recently in Wellington and this was an ideal opportunity for the Board to meet with New Zealand stakeholders. The stakeholder forum attracted more than 50 participants from consumer, public health, industry and government organisations. The Chair Hon Rob Knowles welcomed those attending and the CEO Mr Graham Peachey gave a presentation highlighting FSANZ's role in the food sector, the significance of the bi-national arrangements and the growth in the Wellington Office. He also noted FSANZ's continuing commitment to a strong evidence base, comprehensive consultation and the increasing use of consumer research when preparing standards. Over the next year, FSANZ will also be considering prioritisation of key work, revising its website and improving accessibility for stakeholders.

Mr Glen Neal of the NZ Food Safety Authority outlined NZFSA's current programme. He discussed progress on key projects including the Domestic Food Review, Imported Foods Review and the NZ Total Diet survey.

Following the presentation stakeholders were invited to meet and talk with the FSANZ Board and Executive over refreshments.

FSANZ displays at 2006 events

Come and meet FSANZ staff at the following events:

Date and location	Event
11-13 May 2006 Sydney	Dietitians Association of Australia 24th National Conference for more details see http://www.tourhosts.com.au/dietitians2006/
10 - 12 May 2006 Brisbane	Australian Vegetable Conference for more details see http://www.ausveg.com.au/events-conferences.cfm
26-28 June 2006 Auckland	New Zealand Institute of Food Science and Technology for more details see http://www.nzifst.org.nz/events/annual-conf.asp
9-12 July 2006 Adelaide	Australian Institute of Food Science and Technology Convention for more details see http://www.aifst.asn.au/templates/aifstComponents.aspx?pageID=317
11-19 September 2006 Melbourne	Fine Foods for more details see http://www.foodaustralia.com.au/food/index.asp
11-13 September 2006 Wellington	New Zealand Dietetic Association Conference see http://www.dietitians.org.nz/mainsite/NZDAConferences.html

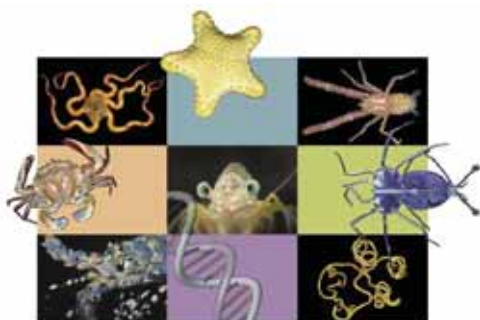
If you enjoyed our last conference in October 2004 at the Gold Coast, the next 'Food Safety Conference – future directions' is being planned for Sydney in March 2007. For the latest information about conferences and events see the FSANZ website at <http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/events/eventscalendar.cfm>

Identifying fish species through barcode

Accurate specimen identification is necessary in many walks of life, from the scientists studying ecology or evolutionary processes, to naturalists and the lay public wondering 'what species is that' to the purchaser of seafood wondering whether the bought fillet of fish was correctly labelled.

DNA barcoding is a method of identifying species based on sequencing a single gene. The gene chosen for this identification is the mitochondrial DNA gene cytochrome oxidase, or COI.

It is a belief that every species has a unique sequence or a unique assemblage of very



closely related sequences. This sequence is termed a barcode.

Barcoding aims to sequence a 655 base pair region of the COI gene and the reproductive isolation that speciation brings means different species will mutate differently giving rise to species-specific sequence or barcode.

Barcoding work first began with work on fish in collaboration with Professor Paul Hebert (University of Guelph, Ontario). There are now about 350 species of fish species barcoded with multiple specimens for most of the species. It is anticipated that all 4,500 Australian fish species will be barcoded.

The fish barcoding will enable the identification of any fish, fish fillet, fish fin, fish egg or larvae, even cooked products or semi-digested remains found in stomachs.

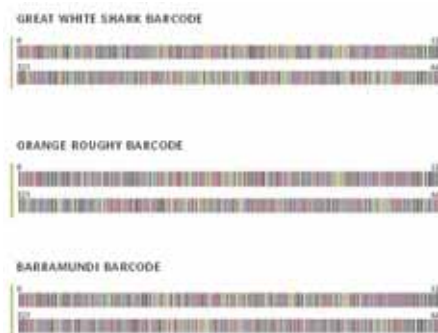
This practice is to be extended in the first instance to invertebrates – crustaceans and echinoderms (starfish) and then to other species.

The barcode databases will be linked to other identification and analysis tools such as, Codes for Australian Aquatic Biota (CAAB)

database, Coastal Maritime Archaeology Resources (CMAR) fish image collection, revised versions of the Australian Seafood Handbooks, the proposed Australian Fish Names Atlas, the international FishBase site and OZCAM (On-line Zoological Collection of Australian Museums) .

It is hoped that all 28,000 fish species found globally, will in time be barcoded as well.

(adapted from a poster presentation by Bob Ward and Bronwyn Innes (Holmes), CSIRO Marine and Atmospheric Research. For further information contact bob.ward@csiro.au)



FSANZ'S Scientific Capability

Science Network

FSANZ has established a Science Network to further strengthen our scientific capability. The Science Network is a component of a broader Science Strategy that is under development. The Science Network has two components: the Food Regulators' Science Forum which will be series of monthly teleconferences to be held with scientists from jurisdictional food regulatory agencies plus a series of topic-specific workshops involving experts from the wider community as well as the jurisdictions,

plus relevant FSANZ Board members and Fellows will also be organised.

FSANZ Student Project Initiative

A Student Projects initiative was launched in 2003 to promote scientific research in areas of particular interest to FSANZ and to promote linkages with academia. Each year a list of Student Project topics are sent to universities as ideas for honours' year and 4th year student projects.

This year three project ideas were picked up by students at the University of New South Wales who undertook a mixture of literature reviews and scientific analysis. Those projects have now been completed and Professor Ken Buckle, a FSANZ Fellow, former Board member and Professor of Food Science at University of NSW, together with the three students, presented their results to FSANZ.

Survey of consumption patterns of non-culinary herbs in foods - Ms Maria Kapnopoulos.

Maria looked at an expansion on a previous year's literature review incorporating a wider range of non-culinary herbs in foods. The project undertook a survey of consumption patterns and knowledge of non-culinary herbs, primarily with university students aged 18-25, but also with the general public through supermarkets and shopping centres.

Analysis of sulphur dioxide levels of food and beverage products - Ms Hien Nguyen

Samples of a variety of foods including mince, sausages, cordials and dried fruits were analysed for sulphur dioxide levels both pre and post cooking. Simultaneous analysis were undertaken with methodology comparative to those utilised at DAL Laboratories in Lidcombe. Results obtained indicated some samples contained excessively high levels of sulphur dioxide.

Survey of consumer food handling practices - Ms Kate Nicholson

This was an extension of a previous project by developing an on-line (anonymous) survey tool for consumer food handling practices. Kate's presentation was runner-up for the AIFST NSW Branch Young Members Award.



Professor Ken Buckle (standing) with the three students who presented their results to FSANZ. (l to r) Ms Maria Kapnopoulos, Ms Kate Nicholson and Ms Hien Nguyen.

FSANZ assists in capacity building in ASEAN member countries

FSANZ recently completed the first phase of an AusAid-funded project titled *Strengthening ASEAN Risk Assessment capability to Support Food Safety Measures*. The two-year project involves FSANZ providing technical input and expertise into a series of activities that are designed to build risk assessment capability in the ASEAN region. The approach being adopted is innovative and designed to achieve maximum uptake of skills by the participants.

This first activity involved an intensive one-week training program in microbiological risk assessment. The program was developed and presented by Deon Mahoney, Narelle Marro and Mark Salter. Participants were drawn from relevant agencies in all ten ASEAN member countries. The training focussed on providing participants with practical skills and

competencies so they will be able to complete a series of regional and sub-regional risk assessment case studies.

The next phase involves the preparation of risk assessments on selected microbial pathogens in shrimps, poultry meat and rice. Participants will gather information and data and liaise with each other and FSANZ over the next six months as they prepare their assessments. This work will culminate in a Recall Workshop scheduled for Kuala Lumpur in November 2006. At this workshop, the microbiological risk assessments will be presented to senior officials from ASEAN countries.

Concurrently, a chemical risk assessment program is about to commence with the first workshop in Hanoi in May 2006.



Left to right: Duncan Craig, Deon Mahoney, Narelle Marro, Michelle Robertson, Greg Paoli, Leon Gorris, Dr Hong Jin

FSANZ actively involved in Australian microbiology conferences

FSANZ Staff recently attended the joint 12th Australian Food Microbiology Conference and the 2nd International Conference on Microbial Risk Assessment in Sydney. The conference combined food microbiology themes and topics with interesting presentations on the developing discipline of microbial risk assessment. Prior to the conference, staff also attended a 1-day FAO/WHO Microbial Risk Assessment Workshop.

The conference attracted 400 registrants including many overseas speakers and participants and provided staff with the opportunity to showcase the work FSANZ is doing in microbial risk assessment to an audience from around the globe. FSANZ staff presented papers on our microbial risk assessment work on raw milk cheese, poultry meat and the challenges of risk assessment and risk management in a regulatory environment. Copies of the papers have been placed on the FSANZ website.

The conference provided an opportunity to meet and develop contacts with an array of

international experts and agencies working in microbial risk assessment. Key points that emerged from the final wrap-up of the microbial risk assessment conference included:

- reaffirmation of the necessity for microbial risk assessments in a regulatory environment;
- the need to move towards quantitative microbial risk assessments; and
- the need for enhanced dialogue with risk managers—before, during and after the completion of a microbial risk assessment and better articulation of the questions to be addressed by risk assessment.

The 3rd International Conference on Microbial Risk Assessment will be held in Paris in 2009.

Public comment invited

You are invited to make written submissions to FSANZ on the following Applications and Proposals:

Initial Assessment Report

- **Closing date 6pm (Canberra time) 3 May 2006:**

Application A575 – Food derived from Glyphosate-tolerant Lucerne J101 & J163: to seek permission for food derived from lucerne genetically modified to provide resistance to the herbicide glyphosate.

Draft Assessment Report

- **Closing date 6pm (Canberra time) 3 May 2006:**

Application A549 – Food derived from High Lysine Corn LY038: to seek permission for food derived from corn genetically modified to contain increased levels of the amino acid, lysine. The corn is intended for use as animal feed.

Application A563 – Medium Chain Triglycerides in Infant Formula Products: to allow medium chain triglycerides, when used as processing aids in preparations of fat soluble vitamins, to be added to infant formula or follow-on formula

Proposal P296 – Primary Production & Processing Standard for Dairy: to develop a primary production and processing standard for dairy.

- **Closing date 6pm (Canberra time) 17 May 2006**

Proposal P277 – Review of Processing Aids (other than Enzymes): to review the structure of the processing aids Standard and the permissions for those processing aids other than enzymes

Upcoming standards issues

In addition to the current applications and proposals out for public comment and those already mentioned in Food Standards News you can keep up to date with our upcoming standards work on our website at <http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/standardsdevelopment/whatscomingupinstand3006.cfm>.



Strengthening the working relationships with our international counterparts – FSANZ invited to speak at the China “Workshop on Food Safety Risk Analysis”

Two professionals from Australia were called upon by the World Health Organization to present at the Workshop on Food Safety Risk Analysis held between 13 and 15 of December 2005 in Guangzhou, China. Dr. Hong Jin, a Senior Food Scientist/Microbiologist (FSANZ), presented topics on Risk Assessment and Risk Management and Samara Kitchener, Executive Director of New South Wales Food Authority, presented the topic on Risk Communication at the workshop. The workshop forms part of the project of “Food Safety Regulatory and Strategic Framework in China”, sponsored by the Asia Development Bank (ADB), the World Health Organization and conducted by the State Food and Drug Administration of China (SFDA).

FSANZ presented Codex principles on risk assessment and risk management and the related WTO principles including SPS agreement. Two exercises were included in the presentations about the process of Risk Analysis Framework and to demonstrate the

social and economic significance of food safety management. Nitrofurans in prawns and enterohaemorrhagic *Escherichia coli* in uncooked fermented meat were used as examples during the workshop to demonstrate practical application of risk assessment and risk management principles in both microbiological and chemical settings.

According to the feedback collected by the national office of SFDA the overall response to the presentations was highly positive, particularly to the examples of the FSANZ experience included in the presentations.

FSANZ and SFDA maintain a good relationship in exchange of information and approaches in food safety management built upon the bilateral memorandum of understanding signed between the Australian Department of Health and Ageing and the Ministry of Health of China in 2004. Participation at this workshop reflects the continuation of such work relationship between the two agencies.

NSWFA Secondment

David Miles has joined FSANZ on a secondment from the NSW Food Authority for the next 3 months and is working with the Food Safety Section, primarily on the development of Primary Production and Processing Standards. In NSW he worked for the Operations Branch of the Food Authority as a Senior Technical Officer and for the past 12 months has been working in the Shellfish Program. Prior to that he worked in a number of areas, including Dairy, Uncooked Comminuted Fermented Meat (UCFM) Products, Eggs and Goat's Milk.



David Miles from the NSWFA

Need assistance with the Food Standards Code?

Call the **Food Code Hotline** for information on food standards for the cost of a local call on 1300 652 166 in Australia or 0 800 441 571 in New Zealand or email advice@foodstandards.gov.au.



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, we develop food standards to cover the whole of the food supply chain – from paddock to plate – for both the food manufacturing industry and primary producers.

We work 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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