

# 1. Background and objectives

Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) is an independent, trans-Tasman, government-funded organisation that has the role, in collaboration with other organisations, to protect the health and safety of the people in Australia and New Zealand through the maintenance of a safe food supply.

In order to fulfil this role, FSANZ desired to conduct research to monitor consumers' awareness and confidence in the food regulatory system and food-related issues. FSANZ anticipated that research would be conducted as an ongoing tracking study, providing benchmark data against which to monitor any changes in consumers' awareness, knowledge and understanding of the food regulatory system and FSANZ. Similar research has been previously conducted by FSANZ into specific issues, such as nutrition information and food safety, but it was anticipated that the findings from the current study would provide a broader interpretation of consumers' attitudes to support FSANZ activities. Information from this survey will allow FSANZ to better understand, prioritise and target consumer concerns overall, and the differences there may be in these concerns between Australia and New Zealand. This, in turn, will assist FSANZ in meeting its broader objectives of maintaining and developing confidence in the food supply. In addition, outcomes of the research may feed into specific standards development projects where appropriate, and the development of targeted consumer information in both Australia and New Zealand. However, it should be kept in mind that FSANZ has a different role in the New Zealand food regulatory environment compared to its role in Australia. In New Zealand FSANZ is responsible for developing and setting food standards and the New Zealand Food Safety Authority is responsible for interpretation and development of information for use by industry and consumers in New Zealand.

Similar consumer attitude surveys are also regularly conducted in other Australian agencies and internationally. Organisations such as Biotechnology Australia, and state jurisdictions, such as the Victorian Government have conducted research into similar topics<sup>1</sup>. Internationally, the United Kingdom Food Standards Agency, the United States Food and Drug Administration's Centre for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition, and the New Zealand Food Safety Authority have all conducted similar studies into consumers' attitudes into food standards and safety.

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<sup>1</sup> Information from RFT (Request for Tender, FSANZ 2006)

## 1.1. Research objectives

FSANZ commissioned TNSSR to conduct the 2007 Consumer Attitudes Survey to gauge and monitor changes in Australian and New Zealand consumers' attitudes, knowledge and confidence in the food regulatory system, food standards and FSANZ in order to inform future consumer related communications and activities.

The objectives of the benchmark, or baseline, study were to collect data on:

### Knowledge and Awareness

- of food regulatory system;
- of FSANZ role and in context of wider environment;
- of food safety, including attitudes and assigned importance;
- of food related issues – specifically which issues are most salient, interesting and of importance to consumers; and
- of major issues being considered by FSANZ, such as iodine and folate fortification and cheese manufacturing (as “add on modules”).

### Confidence

- in the food regulatory system and FSANZ; and
- in the information and assistance provided by FSANZ.

### Information sources

- where consumers find out information about food issues, the different sources for different issues or potential outcomes, and their confidence in different sources.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Overview

The survey design for the Consumer Attitudes Survey underwent considerable development and iteration throughout the course of the research program. The project teams from TNSSR and FSANZ worked in liaison with a broad range of stakeholders and experts to ensure the research was suitably designed to meet the stakeholder needs and objectives. An overview of the methodology employed is illustrated in the following diagram:

Figure 1: Methodology overview



Project scoping and a review of available literature was undertaken prior to conducting qualitative research. This research consisted of eight focus groups, each with approximately 6-8 participants, undertaken in July 2006. Four groups were held in Sydney and four in Auckland. Whilst the scale of the research was relatively small, scope was provided to include a range of consumer types, including age and level of health consciousness (the extent to which consumers pay attention to keeping a healthy diet).

The subsequent questionnaire development drew on the exploratory research and, in addition, consideration was given to incorporating questions from previous FSANZ, national and international research where relevant to allow comparisons to be made.

A pilot survey was conducted online with n=103 members of the TNSSR Online Panel between 13 and 18 April 2007. Following the pilot survey, no further modifications to the survey questionnaire were considered necessary.

Online fieldwork was conducted using the TNSSR Online Panel between 23 and 30 April 2007. A total sample size of n=2000 consumers was targeted, with n=1200 Australian and n=800 New Zealand respondents aged fourteen years or older. Random sampling was undertaken, with a sample drawn separately for Australia and New Zealand. Screening questions were included in the questionnaire to ensure the desired quotas of Australian and New Zealand respondents took part in the survey. Further information on the TNSSR Online Panel and validation tests undertaken are provided in Appendix A.

The overall sample profile for Australia and New Zealand was broadly in line with population data, however, the sample for each country was weighted by age within gender using 2006 population estimates from Australian Bureau of Statistics and Statistics New Zealand data.

*SurveyCraft* was used to produce data tables with full significance testing across subgroups. All tests use the 95% confidence level (z score = 1.96). In addition, in order to explore the relationship between attitudes and behaviour and determine which issues have the most significant and unique impact on overall confidence, a multiple regression analysis was undertaken.

Further detail on each of the phases of the methodology can be found in Appendix B of this report.