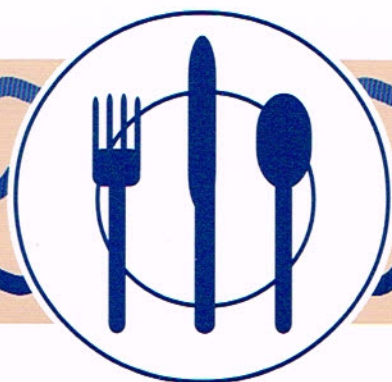


Towards a better food safety system

- greater confidence for consumers,
- productive government–industry partnership, and
- more efficient regulation.



SafeFood NSW was created in 1998 to be responsible for food safety in the primary production and seafood industries.

A Review is now under way to determine what NSW should do next—

- ☐ keep the current food safety system, or
- ☐ establish a single ‘umbrella agency’ covering the entire food production chain?

Have your say

You are invited to respond to the Issues Paper which has been prepared to highlight the issues which need to be considered during the Review of SafeFood NSW.

Towards a better food safety system

The food safety system in NSW is among the best in the world. By and large, those involved in the food production chain maintain high standards, and incidents of food-borne illness are rare.

However, the NSW Government is committed to further reducing the incidence of food-borne illness by improving the State's food safety management system. An improved system would focus on risk prevention throughout the entire food production chain – 'from paddock to plate'.

The Government's goal

An improved system will be one which:

- makes sure food is safe from the point of production to consumption;
- uses state-of-the-art technologies to minimise risks to public health while maximising benefits to industry;
- sets consistent standards;
- educates industry and consumers in food safety; and
- is coordinated, cohesive, and appropriately funded.

Food safety is currently managed by a number of agencies

In the past, a number of agencies managed the various aspects of the food industry.

In 1998 SafeFood NSW was established as a stand-alone food safety agency for the primary production and seafood industries. SafeFood NSW implements programs in the dairy, meat and seafood industries, from production to 'back door' of retail. SafeFood NSW is also responsible for retail meat premises, such as butcher shops and supermarket meat departments. The agency is currently developing programs for the plant products and goat and sheep milk industries.

NSW Health and Local Government councils are responsible for managing food safety regulation in the retail, food service and most secondary manufacturing sectors.

NSW Agriculture is responsible for primary industry regulation. It covers a range of on-farm food safety issues related to food inputs such as stock feed and agricultural and veterinary chemicals.

SafeFood under review

The Review of SafeFood NSW provides an opportunity to further improve the food safety system.

In particular the Review will recommend one of two options for managing food safety in NSW:

- keep the current system (or some variation of it),
or
- establish a single agency to manage food safety through the entire food production chain – from production to retail.



The Review will consider a range of issues

How food regulatory functions should be allocated

If the Review recommends a through-chain agency be created then the functions performed by various agencies may change. Likely functions of a through-chain agency include standard-setting and policy development, audit and inspection work, enforcement action, industry training and assistance, and consumer education.

In addition, the new Food Act requires a coordinator of food regulation – to be known as the ‘relevant authority’. If the current system is maintained, NSW Health will be the ‘relevant authority’. If a through-chain agency is established, it could take on this coordination role.

The Food Standards Code provides standards for both food safety and non-food safety issues (e.g. labelling). Currently, different agencies are responsible for different aspects of the Code, but there may be benefits if one agency manages all food standards.

Consumer information and education

The way people handle food has a significant impact on the incidence of food-borne illness. Food safety education is an important way to reduce illness. At present NSW Health, SafeFood NSW and some Local Government councils play some role in this area, but without central coordination.

How a through-chain agency should be resourced

The Review will consider whether current resourcing of the food safety system is appropriate. A set of principles to share funding for food safety functions between government and industry has been developed. The funding principles for compliance audit, inspection and stakeholder consultation, will be re-considered during this Review.

Benefits and costs of adopting a through-chain agency model

A through-chain agency is likely to deliver a number of benefits, such as improved allocation of resources according to risk and removing duplication in audits and inspection. These benefits need to be compared with the costs of establishing the agency.

Role of Local Government

Local Government (or most councils) has an established role in food safety which will continue. Roles may change with a shift to preventative and enterprise-based food safety programs. A move to a through-chain agency may have further implications.

Inter-agency linkages and responsibilities

The efficiency and effectiveness of the current food safety system, or a system involving a through-chain agency, would improve with formalised arrangements for coordination among all agencies.

Food safety accountability and agency governance

The Review will consider the best way of making the food safety system accountable to the people of NSW. Issues to consider include ministerial responsibility, the nature of the food safety agency(ies), governance arrangements, and the funding and legislative bases. The first step will be to identify a set of principles which can be used to assess the proposed institutional arrangements.

Legislative issues

The nationally-developed Model Food Act, soon to be enacted as the new NSW Food Act, may have implications for existing food safety legislation. Transitional legislative arrangements may be necessary for the through-chain agency to function.

The Reviewer would like your comments

The Reviewer, the Hon. John Kerin AM, will consider all submissions before making any recommendations on the future of the NSW food safety system.

● To receive a copy of the Issues Paper:

The Issues Paper can be downloaded from the SafeFood NSW website at www.safefood.nsw.gov.au. Click on the 'Section 73 Review' tab and follow the directions for downloading the paper.

You can also get a hard copy of the paper from the Review Secretariat:

by calling 02 9295 5796

by writing to Section 73 Review Secretariat
PO BOX A2613
Sydney South NSW 1235

by sending an e-mail to s73review@safefood.nsw.gov.au

● To tell the Reviewer what you think:

Anybody can respond to the matters raised in the Issues Paper.

Details on how to make a submission are included in the Issues Paper.

Alternatively, you can ask your industry / consumer / professional association to make a submission.

● Key dates

June 2002	Issues Paper is released. Consultation period starts. Stakeholders can make submissions from this date on matters raised in the Issues Paper and other relevant matters.
31 August 2002	Consultation period ends. No further submissions will be considered. Submissions will then be analysed and considered by the Reviewer.
31 October 2002	The Reviewer must provide his report to the Ministers for Agriculture and Health by this date. The report will make recommendations on the future of the NSW food safety system.
18 December 2002	The Review Report must be tabled in the NSW Parliament by this date.

