



Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service



CONSUMER PROTECTION

Consumers in Australia and overseas expect that the food they purchase will be safe. The Australian Government, state authorities and industries work together to protect the public and ensure the safety of foods consumed in Australia or exported from Australia.

Programs for consumer protection are administered by the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS),⁷¹ the National Residue Survey (NRS),⁷² Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ),⁷³ the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing,⁷⁴ state and territory government authorities, and Animal Health Australia.⁷⁵

Activities in the many networks and partnerships that help to protect consumers include:

- identification of outbreaks of foodborne illness
- surveillance, prevention and control of communicable diseases
- monitoring of chemical residues, pathogens and environmental contaminants in products
- development of traceability systems for livestock used in food production
- promotion of sound management systems to deliver safe and hygienic food products to the marketplace.

71 www.daff.gov.au/aqis

72 www.daff.gov.au/agriculture-food/nrs

73 www.foodstandards.gov.au

74 www.health.gov.au

75 www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au

7.1 Regulations and standards

The following two sections outline the international and national regulations and standards applicable to Australian consumers.

7.1.1 International

Codex Alimentarius Commission

During 2010, Australia continued to play a strong leadership role in developing international science-based food standards through the Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex) and its subsidiary bodies. Ongoing broad circulation of Codex documents encouraged stakeholders from government, industry, academia and public interest groups to participate in formulating Australian positions on Codex standards under development.

Australia chaired the Codex Committee on Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems (CCFICS). The committee finalised *Principles and Guidelines for the Conduct of Assessment of Foreign Official Inspection and Certification Systems*, which was adopted by Codex in July 2010, and continued to develop principles and guidelines for national food control systems.

Australia commits substantial resources to providing input to Codex committees dealing with food additives and contaminants, residues of veterinary drugs and pesticides, food hygiene, food labelling, food nutrition and food for special dietary uses, and antimicrobial-resistant organisms in foods. Australia also participates in commodity-specific committees concerning milk, fish, fats and oils, and fruit and vegetables.

Australia is strongly committed to participation in Codex and works to develop the strategic and policy direction of the Codex Executive and Commission, as well as the regional coordination committee for North America and the South West Pacific.

Asia–Pacific Economic Cooperation Export Certification Roundtable

The Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, in partnership with the United States, hosted an Asia–Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Export Certification Roundtable on 25–26 February 2010 in Surfers Paradise, Queensland. The roundtable provided a forum for government and industry representatives from APEC member economies to discuss common issues and concerns about requirements for food export certificates in international

trade. Participants discussed unnecessary attestations on certificates, alternatives to certification, and how industry and government can work together. Various sectors of the Australian food industry participated, including the meat industry, the Australian Food and Grocery Council, the horticulture industry and a number of import/export companies.

The roundtable dialogue identified a number of possible next steps, including:

- the possibility of APEC providing technical assistance to avoid unnecessary certificate requirements
- a project on how the Generic Model Official Certificate Annex to the Codex Guidelines for Design, Production, Issuance and Use of Generic Official Certificates (CAC/GL 38-2001) can be more broadly used by APEC member economies
- a project on broadening the use of electronic certification in the APEC region
- individual APEC economies reviewing their certification requirements for food
- a proposal for CCFICS to consider additional work on developing attestations in the generic model certificate.

7.1.2 National

The Australian domestic food regulatory system covers three distinct areas: policy development, setting of food standards, and implementation and enforcement of food standards. An intergovernmental agreement ensures an effective and cooperative national approach to food safety and regulation in Australia.

Policy is agreed by the Australia and New Zealand Food Regulation Ministerial Council and is then used by FSANZ (a statutory authority) to develop food standards for the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code. The ministerial council is chaired by the Australian Government Minister for Health and Ageing (or delegate) and consists of representatives from the Australian Government, the Australian state and territory governments and the New Zealand government.

Food standards

Primary production and processing (PPP) standards for seafood and dairy products have been developed and implemented by all states and territories. FSANZ has begun the process to develop a PPP standard for meat (including game meat) to replace the Australian Standard for the Hygienic Production and Transportation of Meat and Meat Products for Human Consumption

(AS4696).⁷⁶ This standard should be finalised in late 2011 or early 2012. A PPP standard for poultry meat is nearing completion, and a PPP for eggs is expected to be finalised in 2011. New standards have a two-year phase-in period from the date of approval. Other standards under development include raw meat products and seed sprouts.

7.2 Protective measures

Australia has two protective measures in place to ensure consumer safety: communicable disease surveillance (Communicable Diseases Network Australia [CDNA] and OzFoodNet) and residue monitoring.

7.2.1 Communicable disease surveillance

Communicable Diseases Network Australia

CDNA⁷⁷ provides national leadership and coordination for the surveillance, prevention and control of communicable human diseases that pose a threat to public health. Its members include the Australian Government, state and territory governments, and key nongovernment organisations concerned with communicable diseases. CDNA offers advice to governments and other bodies on public health strategies to minimise the effect of communicable diseases in Australia and the region. The network oversees the development and implementation of the National Communicable Diseases Surveillance Strategy, which provides effective national surveillance, preparedness and responses for communicable disease risks. CDNA reports to the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council through the National Public Health Partnership.

OzFoodNet

In 2002, Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, in collaboration with state and territory health agencies, established OzFoodNet to improve surveillance for foodborne disease. This collaborative network of epidemiologists, microbiologists and food safety specialists conducts applied research into foodborne disease and methods for improving surveillance. Reports from OzFoodNet are published in *Communicable Diseases Intelligence*, a quarterly publication of the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing.⁷⁸

OzFoodNet provides early warning, or identifies outbreaks, of foodborne illnesses anywhere in Australia. It ensures a consistent national response to such outbreaks (which may include recall of a food product) and reduces the number of incidents and spread of foodborne illness by prompt preventive action.

7.2.2 Residue monitoring

Industries participate in residue monitoring programs to assess whether existing controls on the use of agricultural and veterinary chemicals are appropriate, and to determine the levels of environmental contaminants. The programs are risk based, and are designed to identify and monitor chemical inputs into Australian production systems that may affect food safety. If noncompliance with controls is detected, the relevant state or territory authority conducts a residue traceback investigation to identify and resolve the source of the noncompliance. The results of monitoring programs also provide confidence for Australian consumers and overseas markets that Australian products meet relevant standards.

For animal products, the NRS conducts residue monitoring programs for the cattle, sheep, goat and pig industries, and for camel, deer, horse, kangaroo, poultry, ratite, wild boar, honey, eggs and some aquatic species. The NRS is located within the Food Exports Division of the Biosecurity Services Group in the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

The Australian Milk Residue Analysis Survey provides a national, independent monitoring program for residues of agricultural and veterinary chemicals and environmental contaminants in raw cows' milk. Dairy Food Safety Victoria (DFSV) coordinates the survey on behalf of the Australian New Zealand Dairy Authorities' Committee (ANZDAC) for the Australian dairy industry.

The South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI) implements national residue monitoring plans for salmon, trout and prawns; and exporter or producer programs for yellowtail kingfish, mulloway and southern bluefin tuna.

In developing residue monitoring programs, NRS, ANZDAC, DFSV and SARDI consult with the relevant industry sector and AQIS to ensure that the programs address any specific export market requirements, as well as domestic requirements.

Laboratories involved in residue monitoring are accredited by the National Association of Testing

76 www.publish.csiro.au/Books/download.cfm?ID=5553

77 www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/cdna-cdna.htm

78 www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/cda-pubs-cdi-cdiintro.htm

Authorities. For programs managed by the NRS, laboratories undergo proficiency testing before being contracted. The testing confirms a laboratory's capacity to conduct analyses to international standards, which underpins the technical validity of results.

7.3 Inspection and monitoring

The Australian Government and state food safety authorities provide consumer protection through inspection and monitoring. Good hygienic practices and hazard analysis critical control point (HACCP) quality systems are used to ensure that meat, dairy, seafood, eggs and the products made from these commodities are safe for human consumption.

Premises used for processing and storing meat, dairy, seafood and eggs and their products for export as food must be registered with AQIS and must comply with structural and operational requirements laid down in the *Export Control Act 1982* and its subordinate legislation, the Export Control Orders. These establishments must have an 'approved arrangement' — a fully documented quality assurance arrangement that includes practices and procedures that demonstrate compliance with legislative requirements. AQIS performs inspection and verification at establishments to ensure compliance with approved arrangements, thus supporting export certification.

In cases of noncompliance with legislation, the approved arrangement or the establishment registration may be suspended, and the product from the establishment will become ineligible for export.

AQIS also manages audits of the export systems by Australia's major trading partners.

7.3.1 Exports of meat

The Australian Government works closely with the state and territory governments and industry to implement control measures for animal health, food safety and chemical residues. This is achieved through review and update of rules, regulations and industry practices in response to international and national developments in food safety. Australia has gradually introduced new food safety initiatives, such as product and process controls based on meat hygiene assessment and HACCP. These controls focus on minimising enteric pathogens on carcasses and processed meat.

Since 1985, the Australian export meat industry has progressively adopted quality assurance systems and implemented a culture of continuous improvement. Quality assurance systems are closely aligned with

international standards developed by Codex and the International Organization for Standardization. They are designed to ensure that the industry assumes greater responsibility for the quality and safety of its products and the accuracy of its documentation. AQIS has primary responsibility for verifying the quality assurance systems at export meat establishments, and state and territory governments are responsible for verifying systems at domestic establishments.

HACCP has been used in the export meat sector since 1994. Domestic red meat processors are required to follow HACCP-based procedures under Australian Standard 4696 (Hygienic Production and Transportation of Meat and Meat Products for Human Consumption). Other Australian Standards exist for game, ratite and poultry meat. The standards describe the requirements that must be met by all Australian slaughter and meat processing establishments during inspection (antemortem and postmortem), slaughter, processing and transport of meat.

The *Export Control Act 1982* and subordinate regulations require export-registered meat industry establishments to implement approved arrangements that describe all procedures that underpin food safety and supply chain integrity. The approved arrangements:

- cover each stage of production of all meat and meat products in the establishment
- provide for the implementation of a HACCP plan for each stage of production
- contain controls that ensure meat and meat products are safe, wholesome and accurately identified
- contain controls that ensure that meat and meat products that are not fit for human consumption are removed from the food chain and segregated from safe and wholesome food
- identify surveillance monitoring and testing programs required by AQIS, including residue and microbiological testing
- identify the applicable importing country requirements for which export certification is required
- require establishments to verify compliance with these and other programs on an ongoing basis.

Establishments that process red meat and game for export have AQIS-employed veterinarians and meat inspectors on site to verify that Australian and relevant export-certification requirements are met. Senior AQIS veterinarians and auditors conduct regular audits of the export meat system.

7.3.2 Exports of dairy, seafood and eggs

AQIS provides export inspection, audit and certification services to industry in line with the *Export Control Act 1982* and its associated regulations and orders. Staff from state regulatory authorities currently perform dairy export inspections on behalf of AQIS, with AQIS staff maintaining a verification role.

In 2009–10, AQIS certified the export of Australian dairy products worth \$2.06 billion to more than 100 countries, as well as exports of eggs and egg products of a lesser value. Exports of Australian edible and inedible fisheries products in 2009–10 were worth \$1.3 billion.

