

Promoting International Harmonisation of Food Standards

FSANZ's International Activities and Engagement

2nd Edition – December 2014

1. Introduction

Collaborating with international agencies responsible for food safety is a high priority for FSANZ, and is becoming increasingly important as globalisation of the food supply continues. We have been engaged in international activities related to food safety for many years and continue to identify and participate in new initiatives. While food-related risks around the world may vary, sharing data and information on methodologies, best practices, and analysis of emerging scientific issues can promote consistent approaches to assessing and managing these risks, and to harmonising food standards internationally.

Our participation in international activities provides opportunities for FSANZ staff to retain and continually update scientific skills and experience, allows us to access the work of other food regulatory agencies and international bodies around the world and increases our scientific profile.

FSANZ collaborates internationally through:

- the Codex Alimentarius Commission
- the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO)
- the Joint Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA)
- the Joint Expert Committee on Pesticide Residues (JMPR)
- the Joint Expert Consultations of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
- the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
- Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)
- international engagement with food safety regulators
- formalised agreements for information exchange
- networks such as the International Food Chemical Safety Liaison Group (IFCSLG), the International Microbiological Food Safety Liaison Group (IMFSLG), the International Social Science Liaison Group and the Food Safety Regulatory Economics Working Group, the WHO Collaborating Centre for Food Contamination Monitoring (WHOCC), Global Coalition on Regulatory Science Research (GCRSR)
- its roles as Co-Chief Editor of the International Food Risk Analysis Journal (IFRAJ).

2. Framework for international engagement

The work that FSANZ undertakes internationally relates directly to statutory requirements in the *Food Standards Australia New Zealand Act 1991*. These requirements are:

Part 1 – 2A Object of Act:

(d) the establishment of common rules for both countries [Australia and New Zealand] and the promotion of consistency between domestic and international food regulatory measures without reducing the safeguards applying to public health and consumer protection

Part 2 - 7 Functions (1) The functions of the Authority are:

(d) to promote consistency between standards in Australia and New Zealand with those used internationally based on the best available scientific evidence

(n) to participate in international, regional and bilateral negotiations on matters that may be included in standards

Part 2 - 10 Objectives of the Authority in developing or reviewing food regulatory measures and variations of food regulatory measures:

(2) In developing or reviewing food regulatory measures and variations of food regulatory measures, the Authority must also have regard to the following:

(b) the promotion of consistency between domestic and international food standards

(c) the desirability of an efficient and internationally competitive food industry

The FSANZ [Science Strategy 2010-15](#) highlights the increasing importance of FSANZ's International work through two strategic areas:

- Building our Collaboration and International Linkages (Strategic area 3)
- Continuing to Provide Leadership in Developing Food Regulatory Science Capacity (Strategic area 6).

International engagement is critical to all our work as it allows us to work effectively in the field of food regulatory science with our international connections.

The FSANZ Science Strategy Implementation Plans, which in the past, have usually been compiled annually, focus on enhancing communications with our national and international regulatory partners, better predicting emerging issues, and food safety capacity building in the Asia-Pacific region with our trading partners.

The ANAO Performance Audit, Food Standards Australia New Zealand (2010) recognised the value of FSANZ participation in groups such as the Quadrilateral Group (QUADS) and membership of international forums such as the Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex) to promote regulatory consistency; positively influence outcomes; share information and scientific expertise with countries that are similar to Australia; remain current with emerging food science technology and issues; and work towards international harmonisation of its standards setting.

3. FSANZ international activities

3.1 Codex Alimentarius Commission

The Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) is the joint Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and World Health Organization (WHO) international food standards setting body of the United Nations. Its role is to establish a broad range of international food safety and quality standards, codes of practice, and guidelines for use by its member countries, which are either taken up in national legislation or referred to in setting national food laws to ensure the safety of the world's food supply and to promote trade in food.

Approximately 180 countries are members of Codex. The Australian Government coordinates a whole-of-government position at the various Codex Commodity and Horizontal Committees through consultation between the Department of Agriculture (Agriculture), Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Department of Health (Health), the Department of Industry, non-government organisations, consumers and the food industry.

Codex standards are referenced in the World Trade Organization (WTO) agreements. The focus of Codex standards is the protection of consumer health and the facilitation of trade. Adoption of Codex standards, and working within the WTO Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) agreements, may result in harmonisation of domestic food standards with international food standards leading to less food-related trade barriers.

FSANZ participation at Codex

FSANZ staff lead the Australian Delegation and/or participate in several of the larger, technically-based, horizontal committees. They also participate in the general, overarching annual Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) meeting, thus contributing to the harmonisation of domestic with international food standards.

FSANZ senior staff lead the Australian Delegation for four of the large technical-based, horizontal committees:

- Codex Committee on Food Hygiene (CCFH) – the CCFH focuses on food microbiological matters, prevention of foodborne disease, development of guidelines and codes of hygienic practice. Recently completed work includes guidelines for the control of specific parasites in meat (*Trichinella* spp. in meat of Suidae and *Taenia saginata* in meat of domestic cattle); a code of hygienic practice for spices and dried aromatic herbs and revision of the principles for establishing and applying microbiological criteria for foods. These principles provide a comprehensive framework for FSANZ's current review of microbiological limits (Standard 1.6.1). New initiatives include the development of guidelines for the control of non - typhoidal *Salmonella* spp. in beef and pork meat, and for applying general principles of food hygiene to the control of foodborne parasites.
- Codex Committee on Food Additives (CCFA) – the CCFA's current focus includes completing the Codex General Standard for Food Additives (GFS) as the primary reference for all food additives in Codex, harmonising food additive provisions for the commodity standards with the GFS, providing advice to the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA) on the priority list for the safety assessment of food additives, allocating International Numbering for food additives (INS numbers), and providing specifications for food additives.
- Codex Committee for Contaminants in Food (CCCF) – the CCCF is currently focussing on elaborating maximum levels for various food contaminants, including work on heavy metals such as lead, mercury and arsenic. The CCCF develops Codes of Practice for preventing and reducing various contaminants such as mycotoxins in grains.
- Codex Committee for Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses (CCNFSDU) – the CCNFSDU studies specific nutritional problems assigned to it by the Commission, drafts general provisions concerning the nutritional aspects of all foods, and develops standards, guidelines and related texts for foods for special dietary uses as appropriate and in conjunction with other committees as necessary. For example, food additive provisions for infant formula and follow-up formula would be referred to CCFA by CCNFSDU. The current focus of this committee is developing Nutrition Reference Values (NRVs), reviewing the general principles for adding vitamins and minerals, and

reviewing the Codex Standard for Follow-up Formula. Australia leads the electronic working group for the development of NRVs.

For these Codex committees, FSANZ prepares the Australian brief in consultation with Codex Australia, and input from other Australian Government agencies and stakeholders. FSANZ often has additional roles such as chairing in-session physical working groups or electronic working groups that undertake specific tasks between sessions. FSANZ staff prepare the delegation reports and chair pre and post-meeting briefings with the Australian delegation members.

FSANZ is also part of the Australian Government delegation to the annual CAC meeting. The Department of Agriculture leads this delegation. FSANZ participates in the capacity of advisor to the delegation on scientific matters arising from the technical committees.

In addition, FSANZ staff have scientific and technical input as required into several other Codex committees, including the Codex Committee on Food Labelling (CCFL), which is led by the Department of Health, the Codex Committee on Pesticide Residues (CCPR), led by Agriculture, and the Codex Committee on General Principles (CCGP), led by the Department of Agriculture and the Codex Australia Office. FSANZ also provides input to some of the commodity committees such as Fats and Oils (CCFO), Fish and Fishery Products (CCFFP), and Fresh Fruit and Vegetables (CCFFV) which are all led by Agriculture.

Overall, the participation at Codex by FSANZ staff greatly facilitates the Australian Government's commitment to harmonisation of national standards with international standards.

3.2 *Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations and the World Health Organization (WHO)*

These two bodies work together to develop scientific opinions, codes of practice, risk assessments, health guidance values and guidance documents that can be used by Codex in setting international food safety standards, and by individual countries to develop domestic food safety standards that are relevant and appropriate in their food control systems.

FSANZ participation at the FAO and WHO

FSANZ staff with relevant experience and scientific expertise are invited to participate in targeted programs for both FAO and WHO as scientific advisors and have established themselves as useful and influential members on several ongoing programs. This participation contributes to the overall process of harmonising international food safety standards.

Generally, FSANZ staff are called on to participate in two types of activities:

- as temporary advisors in FAO/WHO Expert Consultations
- as full or temporary advisors to international scientific bodies, such as the Joint Expert Committee on Food Additives and Contaminants (JECFA) and the Joint Expert Committee on Pesticide Residues (JMPR).

The benefits of involvement in these consultations include keeping abreast of current data, assessment methodologies, best practices, and analysis of emerging scientific issues. FSANZ staff attending these meetings as experts are widely recognised as global leaders in their area of expertise and have significant influence in advancing risk assessments and risk assessment methodologies.

3.3 JECFA

The JECFA is an international expert scientific committee administered jointly by the FAO and the WHO. It has been meeting since 1956, initially to evaluate the safety of food additives. Its work now also includes the evaluation of contaminants, naturally occurring toxicants and residues of veterinary drugs in food. JECFA has evaluated more than 1500 food additives, approximately 50 contaminants and naturally occurring toxicants, and residues of approximately 100 veterinary drugs.

The committee has also developed principles for the safety assessment of chemicals in food that are consistent with current thinking on risk assessment and take account of recent developments in toxicology and other relevant scientific areas such as microbiology, biotechnology, exposure assessment, food chemistry including analytical chemistry and assessment of maximum residue limits (MRLs) for veterinary drugs.

JECFA serves as an independent scientific committee that performs risk assessments and provides advice to FAO and WHO member countries. The requests for scientific advice are channelled through the CAC in their work to develop international food standards and guidelines under the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme. The advice to CAC on food additives, contaminants and naturally occurring toxicants is normally provided to the CCFA and CCCF, and advice on residues of veterinary drugs to the Codex Committee on Residues of Veterinary Drugs in Food (CCRVDF).

JECFA normally meets twice a year with individual agendas covering either (i) food additives, contaminants and naturally occurring toxicants in food or (ii) residues of veterinary drugs in food. Both FAO and WHO invite members to attend these meetings. Members are selected based on scientific credentials and any other expertise considered essential for matters being discussed at the meeting.

FSANZ participation at JECFA

FSANZ's Principal Toxicologist was appointed as a full Member of the JECFA in 2011, after serving for several years as a WHO Temporary Advisor. This is a very prestigious appointment and indicates the high regard for FSANZ scientific staff. FSANZ has led a number of projects for JECFA, including safety assessments on contaminants such as cadmium and acrylamide, several food additives such as neotame and advantame, processing aids and enzymes. In addition, several other FSANZ staff members have been accepted into the JECFA roster of experts or served as temporary advisors.

Several countries, including Australia, use information from JECFA, such as acceptable daily intakes (ADIs) for food additives, or Provisional Tolerable Weekly Intakes (PTWIs) and Margins of Exposure (MoEs) for contaminants, in establishing national food safety control programs. In addition, CCFA, CCCF and CCRVDF develop standards based on evaluations by JECFA. Under the terms of the WTO SPS agreement, scientific, risk-based standards established by CAC should be employed in international trade of food. Therefore, governments are likely to request advice from Codex committees, and consequently from JECFA and other international scientific bodies, on implementing national standards and food safety legislation.

Participation at JECFA means that FSANZ remains at the cutting edge of food safety and toxicological science, and greatly enhances our scientific reputation and acceptance as regulatory scientists internationally. Because of our direct staff involvement in these expert meetings FSANZ has timely access to outcomes.

FSANZ staff participation places Australia in a strong position to establish and support priorities for the FAO and WHO. All countries need to have access to reliable risk

assessment of chemicals in food, but not all have the expertise and funds available to carry out separate risk assessments on large numbers of chemicals. JECFA performs a vital role in providing a reliable and independent source of expert advice in the international setting, thus contributing to the setting of standards and harmonisation globally for the health protection of consumers of food, and for ensuring fair practices in the trade of safe food.

3.4 *FSANZ participation at JMPR*

The focus of this committee is the safety assessment of pesticide residues, and setting of MRLs for agricultural and veterinary chemicals. FSANZ has been represented in the past at JMPR and FSANZ staff have acted as WHO temporary advisors. The ADI for agricultural and veterinary chemicals (pesticides, fungicides and herbicides) is used by the CCPR to establish MRLs that are often adopted by Codex member countries, or used by many countries in considering national MRLs, thus facilitating international harmonisation of international food standards.

3.5 *Joint expert consultations of the WHO and the FAO*

The WHO and FAO regularly commission expert consultations to address a broad range of issues relating to food and agriculture, especially food safety. FSANZ staff have served in expert consultations to develop international guidance documents on genetically modified (GM) food safety and microbiological safety, and to undertake risk assessments or suggest risk management and risk communication strategies for various contaminants such as mercury in fish and Bisphenol A (BPA).

Furthermore, FSANZ staff have been asked to work as WHO temporary advisors on a range of general topics e.g. developing a five year food control plan for the Western Pacific with the WHO Western Pacific (WPRO) Office, and participating in a meeting on Strengthening the International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN) and National Food Control Systems in Asia, held in the Philippines in December 2013. This meeting was convened by the WHO Regional Offices for the Western Pacific and South-East Asia, the FAO, and INFOSAN, in collaboration with and support from the Ministry of Food and Drug Safety, Republic of Korea. The purpose of the meeting was to review progress with participation of Asian countries in INFOSAN and help strengthen national food control systems. FSANZ was invited as a temporary advisor to WHO to provide technical expertise on food control systems and implementing the APEC Food Safety Incident Network.

The meeting recognised the importance of countries harmonising international food standards and processes as much as possible, and taking appropriate action on INFOSAN alerts including greater sharing of information on their response action. It also encouraged in-country links and communication between National International Health Regulations Focal Points, INFOSAN Emergency Contact Points and Focal Points.

FSANZ's invitation and participation at WHO/FAO Expert Consultations on a range of food safety matters is well recognised and appreciated by the international bodies. The outcomes of these consultations are used to facilitate harmonised risk assessments, risk management and risk communication that feed directly into harmonising international food standards.

3.6 *Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)*

The OECD undertakes work to establish the technical guidelines used by most countries around the world and by bodies such as WHO/FAO, the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC). These guidelines are used to manage and harmonise international approaches to technical issues including toxicological testing and food compositional analysis and to ensure a safe food supply. For

example, OECD test guidelines for toxicological studies are used as the standard for gathering data that is used to support applications for chemical and food approvals.

FSANZ staff contribute to the international harmonisation of food safety standards by participating in a targeted number of OECD technical programs as invited members.

3.6.1 *OECD Task Force for the Safety of Novel Foods and Feeds*

This task force addresses aspects of the safety assessment of foods and feeds derived from genetically engineered crops. The work aims to ensure that the types of elements used in risk/safety assessment, as well as the methods to collect such information, are as similar as possible among countries, resulting in harmonisation of international approaches and standards. The approach is to compare transgenic crops and derived products with similar conventional ones that are already known and considered safe in their use based on recognised experience. Harmonised methods and practice, as well as sharing of data are facilitated through the task force activities.

The task force's main output is a set of consensus documents on compositional considerations of new varieties of specific crops (which can enter in the "novel" foods and feeds production). These documents compile a common base of scientific information on the major components of crop plants: key nutrients; toxicants; anti-nutrients and allergens where relevant. Other publications deal with general aspects to facilitate harmonisation in safety assessment. These documents constitute practical tools for regulators and risk assessors dealing with new transgenic varieties, with respect to human food and animal feed safety. To date, 22 consensus documents have been published on major crops and mushrooms, animal feedstuffs, as well as the molecular characterisation of plants derived from modern biotechnology developed in common with the OECD Working Group on Harmonisation of Regulatory Oversight (WG-HROB). This "Novel Food and Feed Safety" Series complement the WG-HROB publications on environmental safety.

A compendium of the consensus documents on novel foods/feeds safety produced by the Task Force since its establishment is being prepared for publication in 2014.

FSANZ participation on the OECD Task Force

As a member of the Task Force, FSANZ contributes expertise as appropriate for the particular commodity. For example, FSANZ completed a consensus document on sugarcane in 2012. Consensus documents developed by the OECD Task Force are used directly in the compositional comparisons between GM foods and non-GM foods when food safety regulatory agencies around the world assess the safety of GM foods, thus contributing to international harmonisation of food standards, in this case specifically for GM foods.

FSANZ also participates on the Bureau of the Task Force (with the US, Canada, Japan, Sweden and the Netherlands) and, as part of this role, we have input into the agenda and three-year work programme.

3.7 *Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation*

The Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) aims to strengthen regional economic integration by removing impediments to trade and investment "at the border", enhancing supply chain connectivity "across the border" and improving the business environment "behind the border".

According to the FAO, APEC economies produce:

- 71% of the world's fish and aquaculture

- 64% of the world's vegetables
- 57% of the world's meat.

APEC endeavours to improve the operating environment for business by reducing the cost of cross-border trade, improving access to trade information and simplifying regulatory and administrative processes. APEC also assists member economies build institutional capacity to implement and take advantage of the benefits of trade and investment reform. APEC supports the multilateral trade negotiations underway in the WTO, and complements the goals of the G-20 Framework for Strong, Sustainable and Balanced Growth in the Asia-Pacific Region.

APEC has a regional focus on food safety and trade facilitation. Along with other international food safety bodies, industry and academics, the work completed through APEC helps to ensure food is safe, both in and outside of the APEC region, and to facilitate the harmonisation of international standards.

3.7.1 APEC Food Safety Cooperation Forum (FSCF)

The APEC Food Safety Cooperation Forum (FSCF) was established in 2007 with the goal of encouraging APEC economies to work together to harmonise food safety regulations with international standards (WTO Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures and Technical Barriers to Trade (SPS/TBT) and Codex), to improve health and food safety outcomes, increase the transparency of food standards of APEC member economies and facilitate trade. The FSCF Partnership Training Institute Network (PTIN) was established in 2008 under a model that establishes a true partnership between governments, the food industry and academia.

FSANZ participation in the APEC Food Safety Cooperation Forum

The APEC FSCF/Partnership Training Information Network (PTIN) is co-chaired by Australia (FSANZ) and the People's Republic of China General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ). Australia (FSANZ) has provided the FSCF Secretariat jointly with China since 2007, and continues to provide critical leadership with China, the United States of America (USA) and other APEC economies.

The APEC FSCF and PTIN model has been well supported and has been very successful in the 21 APEC economies and elsewhere. Under this model a shared strategic vision has been established, along with a formal structure and terms of reference; the needs of APEC economies in relation to food safety capacity building have been identified and realistic and achievable priorities have been set. Partnerships among all sectors have also been encouraged so that duplication of effort is avoided. Also critical to the model's success is monitoring of results and adjustment of the programs where necessary.

To date, four biennial meetings of the APEC FSCF have been held—hosted by Australia (2007), Singapore (2009), United States (2011) and Indonesia (2013). At the 4th APEC FSCF (April 2013) in Surabaya, Indonesia, notable progress was made in raising the profile of food safety capacity building between APEC member economies in its five priority areas:

1. Supply Chain Management
2. Laboratory Capacity Building
3. Food Safety Incident Management
4. Risk Analysis – risk assessment, risk management, risk communication
5. Food Safety Regulatory Systems.

FSANZ has co-chaired all four of the biennial FSCF meetings with China, and provided significant Secretariat support to facilitate all of the work of the FSCF in the five priority areas. Recent areas of work for the FSCF and its PTIN include:

- developing a three year plan (2012–2014) for capacity building programs and securing US\$500,000 in APEC funding and \$1.3 million in co-funding to deliver elements of the plan via the APEC Multi Year Project *Building Convergence in Food Safety Standards and Regulatory Systems*. (FSANZ, USA, China)
- enhancing food safety capacity building in the region with 14 workshops completed. (FSANZ + APEC Economies)
- developing and making freely available the first two reproducible training modules covering supply chain management/HACCP and aquaculture best practices (USA)
- running workshops on food safety processes for small and medium enterprises (Indonesia, 2013)
- establishing the APEC Food Safety Incident Network (FSIN) (FSANZ/China, 2013)
- developing roadmaps for work on export certificates and pesticide MRLs—see also section below (FSANZ/China/USA, September 2014)
- holding a symposium on food allergens (Canada/FSANZ, Vancouver, April, 2014)
- convening a High-Level Regulator-Industry Dialogue (FSANZ/China/USA, September, 2014)
- running lab capacity building workshops on analysis of pesticide residues (China/USA, September 2014)
- collaborating with the APEC Policy Partnership on Food Security (PPFS) to work more closely together to leverage synergies and avoid duplication of effort (FSCF/PPFS).

These initiatives, many of which have been stewarded by FSANZ in partnership with FSCF partners, deliver benefits that collectively build higher levels of trust between APEC member economies, further protect the health and safety of consumers, align domestic regulations with international standards and provide a sound platform for the growth in trade of safe food in the APEC region.

As Co-Chair of the APEC FSCF, FSANZ has significant influence in advancing the goals of the FSCF and provides high level guidance and leadership, reflected in the growth and success of the FSCF. Extensive collaborative relationships have been established not only between APEC member economies, but with international organisations involved in the business of food safety, such as the WHO, FAO, ASEAN and the World Bank.

The APEC Leaders and the APEC Ministers Responsible for Trade (MRT) have regularly recognised the work of the APEC FSCF and its PTIN in developing food safety capacity building in the region, contributing to the alignment of domestic regulations with international standards. Collectively, these initiatives have the potential to deliver further opportunities for trade in food in the APEC region by adopting the private/public partnership approach to developing and implementing food standards.

APEC FSCF Action Plan

At the 4th APEC Food Safety Cooperation Forum (FSCF) held in Indonesia in 2013, the FSCF agreed to progress work on regulatory cooperation by endorsing an “FSCF Action Plan to Implement the APEC Regulatory Cooperation Plan.” It was agreed that roadmaps would be developed for two areas of work: Export Certificates and Pesticide Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs). The overall objective of the FSCF Action Plan is to promote alignment to relevant international standards wherever possible consistent with WTO obligations (the goal to which APEC Ministers agreed in 2011 and reaffirmed in 2012).

The pesticide MRL work is led by Australia and China with working group members from the United States, Chinese Taipei, Thailand, the Philippines, the Grocery Manufacturers Association and the Wine Regulators Forum. This work intends to harmonise MRLs across the APEC region for pesticides through a number of initiatives including recognition of Codex

MRLs and another APEC Economy's MRLs (import tolerances) where there is no domestic equivalent, and work sharing to set MRLs for pesticides. A pilot study using MRLS for pesticides for wine grapes with the APEC Wine Group and the World Wine Trade Group is being progressed as well as a second pilot focussed on a tropical fruit, namely mangoes.

The roadmap for regulatory cooperation on MRLs in APEC economies will allow the FSCF to facilitate, where practical and appropriate, the consideration of regulatory convergence of MRLs across the region. It will also help ensure this work is consistent with the APEC Leader's and the FSCF's overall goal to promote alignment to relevant international standards.

World Bank Global Food Safety Partnership (GFSP)

In 2011 the World Bank group signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with APEC. The signing of the MoU came after the World Bank identified an opportunity to work with the FSCF to promote capacity building for food safety as a global public good and facilitate global food markets and opportunities for developing countries.

By establishing and undertaking the initial administration of a new Public Private Partnership dedicated to food safety capacity building, the World Bank and a network of stakeholders have committed to improving food safety systems that comply with international standards to help ensure safe food, increase food supply chain value, accelerate economic growth and alleviate rural poverty, and improve public health outcomes. This new Global Food Safety Partnership (GFSP) has been designed with a collaborative multi-stakeholder food safety engagement and resource platform and a new multi-donor trust fund (MDTF) dedicated to food safety capacity building. FSANZ, as co-chair of the FSCF is a member of the GFSP on behalf of APEC.

3.8 FSANZ international engagement with food safety regulators

Outside the APEC FSCF, FSANZ is often asked to share its expertise on a range of food regulation topics with developing countries that are advancing their national food control systems. FSANZ has hosted international delegations from a number of countries, including Japan, Saudi Arabia, Brunei, Taiwan, Vietnam, Indonesia and China to exchange information on food regulation, scientific risk assessments, risk management approaches and risk communication. By hosting these delegations FSANZ is helping to promote a harmonised approach to standards development. FSANZ also hosts international representatives who are seconded for short periods to work on specific projects.

Our involvement in WHO and FAO activities gives us the opportunity to influence the development of broad risk analysis principles, contributes to the development of internationally consistent standards, enhances our reputation and standing among stakeholders and international peers and provides access to the most current research. The harmonisation of international standards in turn may have positive impacts on trade, as well as the protection of public health and safety.

3.9 Formalised agreements for information exchange

To ensure a good working relationship with partner agencies in other countries, FSANZ has various agreements in the form of Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) or Letters of Exchange in place to facilitate the sharing of information. For example, we have MoUs or Letters of Exchange with the United States Food and Drug Administration (US FDA), the European Food Safety Agency (EFSA), the Food Standards Agency of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UKFSA); the Food Safety Commission of Japan (FSCJ), the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), Health Canada, the Korea Food and Drug Administration (KFDA), the New Zealand Ministry for Primary Industries, the New

Zealand Environmental Risk Management Authority, and the Chinese National Centre for Food Risk Assessment. These formalised agreements have proven to be highly beneficial for the sharing of confidential information on a range of matters.

For example, the arrangements enable the exchange of confidential information on research already underway or contemplated for the future, including: literature reviews, analytical surveys and risk assessments; and the development of risk management and risk communication options on a range of food safety issues of mutual interest. This exchange of information has proven absolutely critical to respond to national and international food safety incidents, and at times, also useful for facilitating and prioritising work activities.

Areas where FSANZ has worked together with international agencies and leveraged off each other's expertise to avoid duplication of effort have included management of the melamine incident in China, Bisphenol A (BPA), issues on weight loss foods adulterated with illegal therapeutics, and foods contaminated with radioactivity following the Japan, Fukushima nuclear event.

3.10 FSANZ involvement in international networks

FSANZ is involved in a number of international networks, notably the International Food Chemical Safety Liaison Group (IFCSLG) and the International Microbiological Food Safety Liaison Group (IMFSLG). These groups provide staff involved in the risk assessment, management and communication of food chemical /microbial safety with the opportunity to collaborate on issues and agree on a consensus approach to assessing and managing food-related health risks. They also provide FSANZ with the opportunity to show leadership and direction in collaborating on scientific work. The groups have also proven invaluable in fostering consistency and transparency during the management of food incidents. FSANZ also participates in the International Social Science Liaison Group and the Food Safety Regulatory Economics Working Group, which focus on social sciences and regulatory economics respectively.

FSANZ's designation as a WHO Collaborating Centre on Food Contamination Monitoring demonstrates that our work is highly regarded and the data which we generate is sought after by international agencies.

The Global Coalition on Regulatory Science Research (GCRSR) is a US FDA initiated activity that is co-chaired by FSANZ, and comprises four working groups. These working groups include: advances in nanotoxicology (chaired by US FDA), the exposome (chaired by Australia, Therapeutic Goods Administration), bioinformatics (chaired by Canada, CFIA), and other emerging technologies (chaired by US, FDA). FSANZ's principal microbiologist leads Australia's representation on the bioinformatics working group. These groups provide expertise and develop projects to examine key issues and approaches to regulatory decision making. The Executive Committee has also considered possibilities for training and collaborative research and organisational support.

3.11 Benefits of international engagement to other strategic areas of the FSANZ Science Strategy 2010–15

A few key examples are provided below on how our international engagement has helped FSANZ in other Strategic Areas and in some cases has been critical for the effective management of issues.

Strategic area 1: Increasing our scientific capacity and Strategic area 2: Extending the evidence base

Some new areas of scientific endeavour that FSANZ is embarking on involving international partnerships include:

- consumer and social science, and regulatory economics projects
- investigation into levels of a range of food chemicals including trans fatty acids, acrylamide, furan and chemicals found in food contact packing material, in collaboration with the NZ Ministry for Primary Industries
- research into the toxicity of pyrrolizidine alkaloids using animal models in partnership with external researchers.
- establishing food health relationship to support health claims

Strategic area 4: Communication and stakeholder engagement

In the event of food incidents, established networks such as the IFCSLG and INFOSAN have ensured that FSANZ's message in relation to the incident is consistent with the communication messages of other food regulators such as Health Canada, the UKFSA and the European Commission.

FSANZ was a partner in developing the International Food Information Council Foundation's website called the International Center of Excellence in Food Risk Communication. The website at www.foodriskcommunications.org provides resources to help government officials, health professionals, academics, food producers, journalists, the public and other stakeholders communicate and understand concepts, practices, research, and data about food safety, nutrition and health.

Strategic area 5: Our capacity to identify and respond to emerging issues

MoUs and Letters of Exchange with food regulatory counterparts have enabled FSANZ to receive confidential information on food microbiological and food chemical issues with the potential to impact on the Australian and New Zealand food supply. FSANZ staff attend international conferences and seminars on food safety emergency response, food safety risk benefit analysis, risk communication and risk assessment. Our networks, such as the recently established Food Safety Incident Network (FSIN), provide an opportunity for us to readily exchange information with our international counterparts on potential food safety issues.

Strategic area 7: Measuring our performance through peer reviews

FSANZ participation in a broad range of international activities provides opportunities for extensive global networking with food safety regulators, regional groups, and academia. It has enabled FSANZ to tap into the expertise of individuals who are leaders in their field of knowledge to peer review reports, documents, and FSANZ's risk analysis framework. The peer review process provides reliable insight and guidance to the agency and ensures that outputs maintain a high quality standard.

4. Conclusion

Collaborating with international agencies is increasingly important as globalisation of the food supply continues. Our international engagement has given prominence to our work and our investment in international work has flow-on benefits to the agency and its stakeholders.

Networking and sharing knowledge with international counterparts, contributes to the development of internationally consistent risk assessment, risk management and risk communication approaches, and internationally harmonised food standards, enhancement of FSANZ's reputation, access to the most current research, and intelligence on emerging food safety issues.