

Food Safety Unit

Department of Health and Human Services

Food regulation in Victoria

The all levels of Australian government – commonwealth, state, territory and local, share responsibility for developing and administering food regulation in Australia. The commonwealth, state and territory governments jointly develop national food standards, which are embodied in the *Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code* (the Code).

In Victoria, regulation and enforcement responsibilities are allocated to local government through the *Food Act 1984* (the Act). Victoria has two principal streams of food safety regulation:

- the sale of food, which is governed by the Act
- the primary production, manufacture, transport and sale of meat, seafood and dairy products, which are regulated through industry specific Acts.

The Department of Health and Human Services' Food Safety Unit (FSU) has some statutory responsibilities but its main focus is policy development, legislative reform and advice to industry, government and consumers. It works closely with several government departments, including the Department of Economic Development Jobs, Transport and its statutory authorities – Dairy Food Safety Victoria and PrimeSafe – on issues of policy and the development of food standards, and represents Victoria on more than 25 national working groups with either specific or broad interests in food safety.

About the FSU

The role of the FSU is to protect the community from food-related harm, to support public health through strategic regulatory policy development and to influence thinking, policy and programs to achieve a healthier community. The FSU is a multi-disciplinary unit with expertise in food microbiology, food technology, toxicology, chemistry, nutrition and dietetics, and social, health and regulatory policy.

The FSU:

- provides policy and strategy advice for food safety and food regulation in Victoria and supports the Minister for Health in her role as Victoria's lead minister on the Australia and New Zealand Ministerial Forum on Food Regulation
- undertakes food safety risk assessment, incident investigation and response where there are regional, statewide or national implications, including food recalls
- investigates complaints regarding possible breaches of the Act and the Code; for example, food and beverage labelling
- collects and analyses data, including the coordinating and undertaking of food surveillance activities
- researches and undertakes technical analysis to support food safety regulatory activities
- approves food safety auditors, food analysts and food safety program templates
- provides advice, guidance, frameworks, tools and education for stakeholders, including the public, local government and food safety auditors, food handlers and food supervisors
- maintains the register of convictions under the Act
- declares annually local government food surveillance requirements.

The FSU works closely with the Department of Health and Human Services' Communicable Disease Epidemiology and Surveillance Unit and the Office of the Chief Health Officer, especially where outbreaks of illness are suspected to be food-borne. The FSU also works with the department's Water and Environmental Health teams to assess potential food safety risk arising from events such as algal blooms.