

15 September 2016

AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORT

Monitoring Food Safety Practices in Retail Food Businesses

New South Wales has a lower rate of foodborne illness than the national average. This reflects some good practices in the NSW Food Authority's approach to monitoring food safety standards. It also is a factor of the long-standing commitment by local councils' to ensuring retail food businesses meet these standards.

To ensure foodborne illness remains low, the Authority needs to better monitor its arrangements with councils which inspect retail food businesses on its behalf, and receive additional and more timely information from councils on compliance with food safety standards.

These are the key findings of a report released today by the NSW Auditor-General, Margaret Crawford.

The Authority provides guidance and training to councils and retail food businesses to improve their knowledge and compliance with food safety standards. It has also established a standard food safety inspection checklist and guidelines to encourage consistent inspection practices across the State.

However, the arrangements the Authority has with councils to inspect and monitor around 40,000 retail food businesses do not clearly define roles and responsibilities. Nor is the Authority properly monitoring the consistency and quality of regulatory activities conducted by councils. Consequently, there is a risk that food safety inspection and enforcement activities are not applied consistently to ensure all retail food businesses fully comply with food safety standards.

The Authority does not validate the data provided by councils on compliance with food safety standards. It reported an annual compliance rate of more than 90 per cent for retail food businesses in each of the last three years.

Other gaps in the Authority's approach to monitoring councils' food safety inspection and enforcement activities include:

- guidelines for applying the risk-based model are not up-to-date
- current performance indicators are not sufficient to monitor the consistency and quality of the regulatory activities
- networking meetings and training programs organised by the Authority are not always well attended by councils.

Further information

A full copy of the report is on the Audit Office website.

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