

# codex alimentarius commission



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE  
ORGANIZATION  
OF THE UNITED NATIONS



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Agenda Item 7

CX/NASWP 00/7  
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## JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

### CODEX COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR NORTH AMERICA AND THE SOUTH-WEST PACIFIC

Sixth Session

Perth, Australia, 5 – 8 December 2000

#### ACTIVITIES OF CODEX CONTACT POINTS AND NATIONAL CODEX COMMITTEES, INCLUDING THE PROMOTION OF MEMBERSHIP IN THE REGION

#### Background

The 5<sup>th</sup> Session of the CCNASWP noted that the promotion of Codex activities and extending membership of Codex among countries of the Regions had been a priority of the Committee since its first session in 1991. Although membership from the Pacific region had increased substantially since the 4<sup>th</sup> Session of CCNASWP, it was noted that the absence and limited presence of developing countries at Codex Committees was recognised as a major problem due to financial constraints<sup>1</sup>.

Since the 5<sup>th</sup> Session of CCNASWP, the FAO Sub-regional Office for the Pacific Island has conducted, with the assistance of the Codex Contact Points for Australia and New Zealand, five Workshops on the administration of the National Codex Committee in each of the following countries:

- . Tonga, November 1998
- . Fiji, June 1999
- . Cook Islands, August 1999
- . Samoa, June 2000
- . Vanuatu, August 2000.

#### Current Status

Subsequent to the 5<sup>th</sup> Session of the CCNASWP, the government of Solomon Islands has become a Member of the Codex Alimentarius Commission. The current membership of the Regions of North America and the South-West Pacific consists of the following thirteen countries:

Australia	Papua New Guinea
Canada	Samoa
Cook Islands	Solomon Islands
Fiji	Tonga
Kiribati	United States of America
Micronesia, Federated States of	Vanuatu
New Zealand	

<sup>1</sup> ALINORM 99/32, paras 39-40.

## **Considerations**

Circular Letter (CL 00/34 NASWP) invited Member Countries to provide updated information on the activities of Codex Contact Points and National Codex Committees, including the promotion of membership within the Regions. This information will be reproduced as Attachment I to this paper for consideration at the 6<sup>th</sup> Session of the Coordinating Committee.

## REPORTS OF MEMBER COUNTRIES

### AUSTRALIA

#### **Activities of the Codex Contact Point and National Codex Committee**

Since the 5<sup>th</sup> session of the Regional Coordinating Committee for North America and the South West Pacific, there have been a number of initiatives to improve the effectiveness of Australia in the work of Codex, and to improve the long-standing tiered structure for public consultation on Codex matters.

#### *1. Establishment of a Codex Policy Committee*

This high-level Committee consists of the key federal agencies that have direct relevance to the work of Codex. They include: the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Department of Health and Aged Care, Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry – Australia, and the Australia New Zealand Food Authority.

The work of this Committee is complementary to other national consultative processes including the National Codex Committee and Codex Advisory Panels. Its specific mandate is to provide high-level policy advice on cross-cutting Codex issues, provide direction on contentious issues, oversee Australia's input to the Codex Strategic Vision and Medium-Term Plan, endorse lead agencies for Australia's work in Codex, oversight Australia's host-government responsibilities, and to endorse priorities for Australia's work in Codex.

#### *2. Review of the National Codex Committee*

The National Codex Committee (NCC) is an integral part of the Codex program in Australia. In a recently concluded review, its overarching functions and objectives were redefined as reviewing and providing policy advice on the coordination of Australia's role in the UN Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme, and providing a mechanism through which the diverse views of all stakeholders may be taken into account in Australia's work in Codex.

The revised terms of reference of the NCC will ensure that:

- ◇ the strategic objectives for Australia's interests in Codex are regularly revised and implemented by all stakeholders;
- ◇ priorities are identified for Codex work within Australia;
- ◇ Australia's ability to respond to Codex issues will be monitored; and
- ◇ implications from Codex outcomes for the national interests will be identified and brought to the attention of the relevant agencies.

The membership of the NCC has also been reviewed and extended to include a broader group of industry bodies, and tertiary and research institutions. Work is continuing in conjunction with consumer bodies in regard to the extent of consumer participation in the NCC.

#### *3. Priority setting for Australia's input to Codex*

Australia, like many other Codex Member Countries, faces the difficult issue of determining the areas of Codex work where its efforts would be the most effective and providing an appropriate level of resources for this work.

To this end, the National Codex Committee has developed a priority setting framework based on business risk principles. The defined process will assist in Australia's on-going work within the Codex program by defining the recommended management and monitoring of Codex issues as well as identifying the most relevant agency to be responsible for the work.

The priority setting framework covers three areas of the risk-based process. Firstly the context, or environment, will be identified. This is determined against ten criteria covering:

1. consistency with national priorities taking into account current work and potential new work within Codex and Australia's strategic objectives for its work in Codex;

2. protection of the health of consumers by determining a level of input to the Codex work commensurate with the level of risk to human health;
3. provision of consumer information and avoidance of unfair and deceptive practices, taking into account international obligations in regard to the WTO Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade and the Codex Code of Ethics for International Trade in Food;
4. the impact on trade having regard for commercial opportunities, the value of trade, WTO obligations, and whether work in other international fora adequately meets Australia's needs;
5. implications for the domestic environment. In particular, consideration will be given to the impact on the national regulatory framework and the potential impact on Australia's agri-food producing industries;
6. access to technical or commercial data or other relevant information necessary for Codex to undertake its work in a given area;
7. ability to build linkages with other Codex member countries and international organisations;
8. the level of stakeholder interests and involvement by relevant officials, experts, and industry;
9. the level and availability of resources, human and financial, to undertake specific work in Codex; and
10. the effectiveness of Codex to meet its objectives.

The subsequent steps in the priority setting processing include:

- . identifying likely consequences, evaluating the acceptability and magnitude of consequences should they arise; and
- . identifying how an issue should be monitored, methods and timing of reviewing issues. And
- . identifying the best method of communicating results and future work on the Codex subject matter with stakeholders.

Responses are provided in a pro-forma to achieve a degree of consistency in the responses and decisions taken. All stakeholders in Codex work including government, industry, and consumer/public interest groups have the opportunity to participate in this process.

#### 4. *Web site*

Codex Australia is presently developing a web site for all Codex work within Australia. This will be an interactive site with linkages to other key Codex-related sites. A web page for the Codex Committee on Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems is already operational under the home page of the Australian Quarantine and Inspection System (AQIS) at >>[www.aqis.org](http://www.aqis.org)>>.

#### 5. *Strategic Objectives for work in Codex*

Australia introduced in 1998 a strategic planning approach to its work in Codex for the period 1998 - 2002. Since that time implementation of the Strategic Objectives has been monitored by the National Codex Committee. The National Codex Committee has commenced work on developing the Strategic Objectives for Australia's interests in Codex for the period 2003-2007.

#### 6. *Capacity building*

The Codex Contact Point in Australia has a strong interest in the capacity of developing countries within the Region achieve economic benefits from participation in the work of Codex. To this end, assistance has been provided to the FAO in training workshops that will strengthen the administration of the National Codex Committees and the national Codex Contact Points in a number of countries within the Pacific Region. These workshops, conducted in Tonga, Fiji, Cook Islands, Samoa and Vanuatu, have engaged broad representation from industry and community sectors as well as from government; in many cases these public sector groups have met for the first time with governments on issues related to food safety and food standards. Each workshop has promoted awareness within participants of food control systems, food quality and safety, and the role, functions and importance of the Codex Alimentarius Commission. All workshops have resulted in the development of comprehensive action plans, establishment of the National Codex Committee or Executive Committees with a mandate to establish NCCs, and have identified the need to review national food legislation to reference Codex norms.

## **CANADA**

Since the last report at the 5<sup>th</sup> Session, Canada has conducted several initiatives to enhance the Codex Program in Canada.

Canada has developed a Strategic Plan for the Codex Program which outlines several strategic goals for the next 3 - 5 years. We have begun to implement this Plan and have already recognized benefits from this implementation with improved access to Codex documents by NGOs with a resultant greater transparency of the Codex process within Canada. Annex A contains the goals outlined in our strategic plan for Canada's involvement in the Codex program.

We have launched a Codex Canada Web-site which has further increased the availability of Codex documents and has provided heightened visibility to the program. We have received favourable comments from several stakeholders groups and have made modifications based on this feedback to make the site even more user-friendly. The Web-site has proven to be an effective complement to our electronic mailing system. The Web-site provides access to Codex documents either through direct linkages to the FAO Codex Web-Site (see CX/NASWP 00/4, Annex A) or by posting documents not available on the FAO Codex Web-Site such as Circular Letters.

The Office of the Codex Contact Point for Canada is working co-operatively with the Inter-American Institute for Co-operation on Agriculture (IICA) and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to develop and present a workshop on Codex. The workshop is being provided to the English speaking countries of the Caribbean and is designed to help these countries develop strategies for enhancing their participation in the Codex process and strengthen their Codex programs. The workshop is tentatively scheduled for the Winter, 2001 in Guelph, Ontario.

## **NEW ZEALAND**

The New Zealand Codex Contact Point's (NZCCP) activities at the national level over the past two years include a review of New Zealand's Codex Strategy, ways of improving consultation and participation in Codex activities, and encouraging use of the New Zealand Codex website. At an international level, capacity building has been pursued using all available resources. The following provides more detail on these areas.

### *New Zealand Codex strategy 2001-2005*

New Zealand is reviewing its 1996 policy document defining our strategic objectives and direction in Codex. Over the last four years, the strategy provided New Zealand with a sound framework for our participation. We are now refocussing our strategic objectives and medium term plans on areas where our strongest interests lie.

The updated New Zealand Codex Strategy will focus on the following key areas:

- providing support for those committees working towards simplification and harmonisation of standards;
- participating to the maximum extent possible to promote development of international standards that meet the objectives of health protection and trade;
- developing, maintaining, and enhancing procedures to ensure transparency, adequate consultation and participation of governmental and non-governmental groups in Codex activities;
- contributing to the development of international standards and guidelines for the application of risk analysis methodology in Codex, and integrating the principles of risk communication, risk assessment and risk management at the national level;
- contributing to the maximum extent possible to capacity building with developing countries;
- strengthening our national food safety and control systems; and
- being forward looking in our strategic objectives and work commitments, and leading in areas of high interest to New Zealand.

### *Codex consultation meeting*

In reviewing New Zealand's Codex Strategy, emphasis was placed on providing an opportunity for consumers, industry, and other non-governmental organisation members to take part in defining New Zealand's strategic objectives for the future. The NZCCP held a consultation meeting in September 2000 to discuss a revised draft of the Codex Strategy and areas of importance and relevance to New Zealand.

More information about New Zealand's consultation processes is provided in New Zealand's submission on agenda item 8.

### *Codex website*

Use of the internet has been steadily increasing; more and more information is being shared electronically. In delivering on its responsibility to share and promote Codex activities nationally, the NZCCP uses the re-vamped New Zealand Codex website, administered by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF), as a primary communication method ([www.maf.govt.nz/codex](http://www.maf.govt.nz/codex)).

The New Zealand Codex website was re-designed with the following users in mind:

- the 'new user' with no background information about Codex; and
- the 'informed stakeholder' interested in specific areas.

The website is focused on the following purposes:

- providing background information on Codex (including access to the *Understanding the Codex Alimentarius* publication);
- outlining the processes that occur in Codex and in New Zealand (including rules and procedures for New Zealand delegations);
- informing the public and providing access to documents and national meeting times; and
- providing useful links and opportunity for feedback/comments.

The NZCCP plans to use the website as a vital communication tool and will further promote this in future meetings. Information will still be made available in hard copy for interested parties lacking access to the internet. The New Zealand Codex website is still under development, and feedback from users is encouraged.

### *Regional food safety conference*

MAF co-hosted, with the US Food and Drug Administration (USFDA), a Pacific/Southeast Asia Food Safety Conference in August 2000. The conference was attended by over 280 delegates from around the region and was opened by Her Excellency, Carol Moseley-Braun, US Ambassador to New Zealand.

The USFDA component comprised a 'regional outreach' programme opening with an overview of the US national food safety initiatives and then sessions on the US Department of Agriculture, risk assessment, exporting food to the US, foodborne disease surveillance and a series of product specific HACCP sessions.

The New Zealand component covered trading with specific nations/regions, food administration, risk management, the regulatory regime and product specific sessions, consultation, communication and consumer views and the industry view. Speakers for the New Zealand component were primarily drawn from MAF but also included industry, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) and Australia New Zealand Food Authority (ANZFA).

### *Capacity building*

As a signatory of the Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) WTO Agreements, New Zealand has a clear obligation to assist developing countries to participate in international standards bodies. With the growing awareness of, and interest in, food safety issues has come a realisation of the need to assist developing countries to improve domestic food safety and enable countries to participate in international food trade.

The NZCCP is working closely with countries that have not participated in Codex. Assisting with administrative structures, technical matters, providing training and analysis workshops targeted at different groups at the national level. Within the limits of its resources, New Zealand has had an active programme of technical assistance particularly in the South West Pacific region. In the last two years, New Zealand has participated in technical assistance missions to the Cook Islands, Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu, aimed at strengthening national Codex administration and promoting better understanding of the CAC and its relevance to these countries. New Zealand expertise has also been used for workshops on risk analysis.

**OBJECTIVES OF CANADA'S CODEX PROGRAM**

**Objective #1:**

To improve the operation, coordination and communication of Canada's activities in Codex.

**Objective #2:**

To expand the extent of involvement of Canadian stakeholders, including consumers, industry, health professionals and Provincial and Territorial Governments.

**Objective #3:**

To promote the four "*Statements of Principles Concerning the Role of Science in Codex Decision Making Process and the Extent to Which Other Factors are Taken into Account*" and the use of risk analysis in the development and application of international standards.

**Objective #4:**

To support the development of a "horizontal" approach to cross cutting issues within the Codex General Subject Committees and between Codex and other international bodies.

**Objective #5:**

To establish a procedure to review Codex codes, standards, guidelines and recommendations as the basis for national standards in order to ensure public health protection while enhancing international regulatory harmonization for the purpose of facilitating trade.

**Objective #6:**

To strengthen Canada's relationship with other Codex member countries and promote consensual decision-making and problem solving within Codex.