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| **Food safety strategy** |
| **Name of Council** |
| 2013 |

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# Executive summary

Food safety is an issue that affects everyone. In Australia there are approximately 5.4 million cases of food-borne illness annually which costs the community $1.2 billion per annum (Department of Health and Ageing 2006).

Name of Council is committed to supporting the food industry continually implement safe food practices. This food safety strategy details how Council will advance food safety by focusing on Council’s processes, systems and services including support services for local food businesses and consumers. Key programs include:

* List the main Council programs that support food safety.

Summarise other key information contained in your customised Food Safety Strategy.

# Introduction

Adapt the example introduction to suit your Council.

Food safety is an issue that affects everyone. In Australia there are approximately 5.4 million cases of food-borne gastroenteritis annually which leads to 1.2 million visits to doctors and 2.1 million days of work lost each year. Food-borne illness is responsible for over 18,000 hospital admissions and approximately 120 deaths per year in Australia. In total, food-borne illness costs the community $1.2 billion per annum. (Department of Health and Ageing 2005; Department of Health and Ageing 2006).

Several factors may have influenced changes in frequency and occurrence of food-borne illnesses, including:

* Changing food consumption patterns including:
	+ increasing diversity of food (e.g. cultural diversity has resulted in a wider selection of food using a variety of ingredients); and
	+ changing consumer demands (e.g. increased reliance on ready-to-cook, ready-to-eat and takeaway meals; trends towards eating foods with minimal processing and preservatives);
* Changes in food manufacturing, retail, food distribution and storage;
* Emergence of new food pathogens; and
* Increasing numbers of more susceptible individuals (e.g. the young, the elderly, pregnant women, people with compromised immune systems). (Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services 1997).

Name of Council is committed to advancing food safety for the benefit of the food industry, residents and consumers. Council recognises that to advance food safety we need to ensure effective systems which support local food businesses to continually adopt safe food practices are implemented and that consumers are supported to make informed choices about food safety. To protect consumers and the reputation of the local food industry, Council also recognises that breaches of the food safety laws need to be dealt with in a manner that is proportionate to the risk (e.g. situations that create serious food safety risks will be dealt with swiftly and using legal tools; less serious risks may be dealt with using education and other support tools).

This Food Safety Strategy details how Council will advance food safety by focusing on Council’s processes, systems and services including support services for local food businesses and consumers. Implementation of this strategy will also help Council meet its legal obligations, prioritise work based on risk and maximise efficiency in the administration of the food safety laws.

## Aims and objectives

Adapt the example aims and objectives to suit your Council.

Name of Council aims to advance food safety to protect the health and well-being of local residents and consumers by reducing the risk of food-borne illness. Council will use the range of programs and services detailed in this strategy to promote and improve food safety and maximise ongoing compliance with the *Food Act 2006*(amend the name of the Act if your Council is not in Queensland).

Council aims to be a leader in food safety regulation who collaborates with the food industry and adopts a holistic approach to achieving food safety. This Food Safety Strategy will assist Council to achieve this goal.

The objectives of this strategy are to:

* Strengthen Council’s relationship with and support for the food industry.
* Ensure the owners, managers and employees of food businesses understand food safety principles, continually adopt safe food practices and understand their legal responsibility to ensure food safety.
* Encourage a culture of ongoing compliance with the *Food Act 2006*(amend the name of the Act if your Council is not in Queensland) within the food industry.
* Recognise and reward businesses that do consistently adopt safe food practices and continually comply with the *Food Act 2006*(amend the name of the Act if your Council is not in Queensland).
* Deter unsafe food practices and breaches of the *Food Act 2006*(amend the name of the Act if your Council is not in Queensland).

## Links to Council’s corporate plan

Explain how this Food Safety Strategy will support Council to achieve the goals specified in Council’s vision, corporate plan or other key documents.

## Links to the Customer Service Charter

If your Council has a customer service charter, explain how this Food Safety Strategy supports the implementation of the charter.

# Our approach to food safety

Adapt the example introduction to suit your Council.

Name of Council prefers adopt a supportive and collaborative approach to food safety. However, Council will take enforcement action when necessary to protect consumers from unsafe food practices.

A brief explanation of the laws used to regulate food safety and Council’s obligations under the food safety laws are provided below. A detailed explanation of Council’s approach to food safety is also provided.

## Food safety laws

Please amend the information provided about food safety laws as necessary, particularly if the Council is located in a state/territory other than Queensland.

In Queensland the *Food Act 2006* is the primary law that regulates food safety in food manufacturers, restaurants, cafés, coffee shops, fast food businesses, bakeries, supermarkets and other food shops.

The main purposes of the Food Act are:

* Ensuring food for sale is safe for human consumption. Food is considered ‘unsafe’ if it likely to cause physical harm to a person who may eat it. For example, food that contains enough bacteria to make a person very sick would be unsafe.
* Ensuring food for sale is suitable for human consumption. Food is considered ‘unsuitable’ if it damaged, deteriorated or perished to an extent that affects its use; is from a diseased animal; or contains a biological (e.g. bacteria, virus), chemical or other substances that should not be in the food. For example, if food is contaminated by a cleaning chemical that affects how it tastes, but there is not enough chemical in the food to a consumer sick, the food would be considered unsuitable.
* Preventing misleading conduct relating to the sale of food. ‘Misleading conduct’ can involve misleading or deceptive behaviour associated with advertising, packaging or labelling food. For example, making a health claim on packaging that has not been proven would be misleading conduct.
* Applying the Food Standards Code. The Food Standards Code is a document that specified what can and can’t be in food (e.g. the maximum levels of food additives) and includes ‘Food Safety Standards’ which detail what food businesses must do including the structural requirements of food businesses, cleaning, maintenance, safe food handling, etc. The Food Standards Code is a national document which is used to improve consistency in requirements of food businesses across Australia.

Responsibility for enforcing the Food Act is shared between the State government (i.e. Queensland Health) and local governments. Queensland Health is responsible for investigating and regulating:

* The cause of food-borne illness;
* Foreign matter (e.g. pieces of plastic) found in food;
* Food composition issues (e.g. the meat content in sausages);
* Labelling requirements;
* Misleading and deceptive advertising, packaging or labelling; and
* Food safety issues at government institutions (e.g. public hospitals, public schools).

Local governments are responsible for:

* Licensing food businesses;
* Enforcing the Food Standards Code in relation to the conduct of a food business and food intended for sale;
* Assessing and approving Food Safety Programs (i.e. a document that identifies the food safety risks in a business and how they will be controlled) which some businesses (e.g. private hospitals, child care centres) must have; and
* Ensuring food safety programs are audited.

Queensland Health and local governments are both able to investigate and enforce the legal requirements relating to the sale of unsafe food and handling food in an unsafe manner.

Council employs Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) who have specialised knowledge in food safety to monitor and regulate food safety issues in our area. Council’s EHOs are involved in:

* Assessing applications for new food businesses or businesses that will be renovated or expanded;
* Assessing applications for food business licences;
* Assessing Food Safety Programs and ensuring they are accredited and audited as required by the Food Act;
* Inspecting licensed food businesses to ensure they are adhering to the requirements of the Food Act and Food Standards Code including ensuring food is being handled and stored safely, food is not being contaminated, food handlers have the skills and knowledge they need to be able to prepare food safely, the premises are clean and well maintained, there are no pests in the premises, etc.; and
* Investigating complaints about licensed food businesses, illegal food businesses, unsafe food handling, etc.

## Risk-based compliance

Adapt the information about risk-based compliance to suit your Council.

Council has adopted a risk-based compliance approach to ensure that our limited resources are used to target the food safety issues that create the biggest risks to consumers. During the development of this Food Safety Strategy Council has reviewed relevant programs and services to ensure we are supporting businesses to comply with the food safety laws and we can identify and focus on businesses that pose a risk to the community.

The benefits of adopting a risk-based compliance approach include:

* Improved compliance outcomes by customising actions to effectively deal with the most significant risks.
* Efficiency gains by targeting programs to concentrate on issues that will have the greatest outcomes.
* Reduced business compliance costs by only imposing requirements that are needed.
* Greater business support for compliance measures by ensuring the compliance approach taken is widely understood by business. (The Better Regulation Office 2008).

Risk-based compliance is achieved by working through the series of steps shown in figure 1(update the figure number if additional diagrams have been added in previous sections).

Figure 1: The risk assessment steps involved in developing a risk-based compliance approach.

(Source: The Better Regulation Office 2008, p.4)

Update the figure number if additional diagrams have been added in previous sections. To update the figure number, right click on the number and select ‘update field’.

Detail how your Council has worked through these steps. It may be beneficial to attach relevant information (e.g. risk assessment of non-compliances) as appendices.

## Council’s compliance policy

Adapt the example text to suit your Council.

Name of Council will be fair, objective and professional in carrying out regulatory activities to ensure safe food practices are adopted and the requirements of the *Food Act 2006*(amend the name of the Act if your Council is not in Queensland) are obeyed. Council’s approach to food safety regulation is documented in ‘title of document’ which is available via web address. Adoption of the protocols set out in ‘title of document’ will ensure consistency, transparency and accountability.

Explain your Council’s compliance policy.

# Food safety services

This section of the strategy details how Council has implemented systems and services that support food businesses to understand food safety requirements and comply with the food safety laws at all times.

## Council’s systems and processes

### Accessing information

In this section explain how people can access food safety information the Council and other important organisations (e.g. the State health department) provide. Also explain how the format, location, etc. of information has been designed to maximise accessibility and support food businesses understand what they need to do and why.

### Council’s processes

Explain how Council’s processes (e.g. application processes) have been established or amended to support food businesses comply with the Food Act and encourage the behaviour Council expects of food business operators (e.g. ongoing proactive management of food safety issues).

### Consistency

Detail how Council will maximise consistency between EHOs and what Council is doing to enhance regional consistency in this section.

### Communication

In this section explain what information Council will communicate, how it will communicate and why the relevant communication methods have been selected.

### EHO’s skills and knowledge

In this section detail the qualifications and expertise of EHOs and how EHOs are supported to maintain their technical knowledge and soft skills.

### Inspections

In this section explain Council’s inspection program (e.g. businesses servicing higher risk populations such as private hospitals and businesses with a history of non-compliance are inspected more frequently, each business is inspected at least once a year), the focus of inspections and other relevant details.

### Food safety complaints and food-borne illness investigations

In this section explain how Council responds to food safety complaints and is involved in investigations of food-borne illness outbreaks. Also explain how the information of complaint and food-borne illness investigations are used to inform future education campaigns, etc.

### Targeted programs

In this section explain if your Council undertakes targeted programs. If they do, also identify which programs have been undertaken in the past and explain how Council identifies which targeted programs to undertake in the future.

### Liaison with other organisations

In this section explain how Council works with other organisations to advance food safety in the local area.

### Advocacy for our local food businesses

In this section explain how Council advocates for local food businesses. Explain how a business can raise an issue or seek Council’s help to resolve an issue.

## Support for food businesses

### Understanding of the food industry

In this section detail how your Council has developed/will develop a deep understanding of the local food industry and how that information has been/will be used to influence Council programs.

### Business support

Explain all services/programs Council offers to support local businesses and how these services/programs can be accessed.

### Resources for food businesses

In this section detail the resources available to food businesses to support them to comply with the food safety laws. Also include information about how food businesses will be updated about changes to requirements.

### Training

In this section detail the food safety training available to local food businesses. If relevant, explain how food safety training has been customised to meet the needs of local food business operators.

### Incentives

#### Food business rating schemes

If your Council has a food business rating scheme, provide the details in this section.

#### Other incentives

Provide the details of other incentives (e.g. reduced licence fees) Council uses to encourage ongoing adherence to the food safety laws in this section.

## Support for the community

### Food safety promotion

In this section detail the programs and resources Council uses to promote food safety in the general community.

### Food business rating schemes

If your Council has a food business rating scheme, detail how consumers have been educated about how the scheme works and how to use it.

# Program evaluation

In this section detail Council’s approach to evaluating its food safety programs and services. Also include information about the short and long-term evaluation of specific projects (e.g. targeted projects).

# References

Add any additional references you have referred to in your customised food safety strategy.

Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services 1997, *Foodborne disease: Towards reducing foodborne disease in Australia*, accessed 2 November 2013, [http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/cda-cditech-foodborne.htm/$FILE/foodbrne.pdf](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/cda-cditech-foodborne.htm/%24FILE/foodbrne.pdf).

Department of Health and Ageing 2005, *Foodborne illness in Australia: Annual incidence circa 2000*, accessed 2 November 2013, [http://www.ozfoodnet.gov.au/internet/ozfoodnet/publishing.nsf/Content/7BDEF9F8EC3835D9CA257165001AB31D/$File/foodborne\_report.pdf](http://www.ozfoodnet.gov.au/internet/ozfoodnet/publishing.nsf/Content/7BDEF9F8EC3835D9CA257165001AB31D/%24File/foodborne_report.pdf).

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The Better Regulation Office 2008, *Risk-based compliance*, accessed 2 November 2013, <http://www.dpc.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/30862/01a_Risk-Based_Compliance.pdf>.