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Seafood Safety

In Australia the demand for seafood has increased over recent decades and continues to grow. Australia has a global reputation for high quality seafood which allows exporters to access premium international markets.

Seafood is deemed a potentially hazardous food and businesses that process and sell seafood must be licensed with PrimeSafe and comply with the Food Standards Code Australia New Zealand (the Code). The Code contains the Primary Production and Processing Standards, which prescribe requirements for food safety and hygiene practices, and construction of equipment and premises.

To keep seafood free from contamination and prevent food borne illness, the following requirements for all seafood businesses are provided:

- Ensure that the temperature of freshly caught seafood (not live) is reduced quickly to 5°C or immediately frozen, and maintained under these conditions until sold;
- Check that the receival temperature of fresh chilled seafood is 5°C (or less), or is frozen;
- At receival record the quantity of seafood and details of the supplier and/or harvester of the seafood at receival to ensure traceability;
- Segregate raw seafood from cooked and ready-to-eat (RTE) seafood during processing, storage and display;
- Ensure that RTE seafood served hot is maintained at a temperature above 60°C;
- Frozen seafood should not be thawed in water;
- At no stage should seafood be re-frozen;
- Ensure that seafood is displayed so it cannot be handled by customers;
- Identify and fix equipment and premises construction maintenance deficiencies to prevent contamination and pathogen growth on seafood;
- Remove pooling water from floors and any other surfaces regularly; and
- Country of origin labelling is no longer a PrimeSafe requirement and for more information please contact the ACCC.

Temperature Control

Temperature control of potentially hazardous foods such as seafood prevents bacteria that cause food borne illness from multiplying in the food or producing toxins. The Code requires seafood to be kept either 5°C or colder, or 60°C or hotter during receival, storage, display and transport. Any seafood that is frozen must remain hard frozen when delivered and kept frozen during storage, display and transportation. If seafood is thawed for sale then it must be labelled accordingly and not refrozen.

Cooking and Cooling

Processing steps involving a heat treatment can eliminate *Listeria monocytogenes* and other pathogenic microorganisms from seafood. Refrigerated seafood products with a shelf life of less than 10 days must be heated to at least 70°C for 2 minutes, or heated to 75°C. Cooked seafood that is intended to be cooled and used later, must be cooled to 5°C or below as quickly as possible to reduce the opportunity for bacteria to multiply. The Code requires food to be cooled from 60°C to 21°C within 2 hours, and from 21°C to 5°C within a further four hours.

Bivalve Molluscs

Bivalve molluscs such as oysters, scallops, mussels and pipis are filter feeders which means their food is particles filtered from the seawater. These particles may include pathogenic bacteria, viruses, algal biotoxins and environmental contaminants that can cause food borne illness when molluscs are consumed by people. As bivalve molluscs are commonly eaten raw, and toxins are not destroyed by cooking, compliance with the Victorian Shellfish Quality Assurance Program (VSQAP) is required. This includes compliance elements from the nationally recognised Australian Shellfish Quality Assurance Program (ASQAP) that ensures licensees meet the requirements of bacteriological monitoring program for water and shellfish. There are additional testing requirements for biotoxins in bivalve molluscs which are described in [Standard 1.4.1 of the Food Standards Code](#) and in [Schedule 19 of the Food Standards Code](#). The microbiological requirements of cooked and raw crustacea, bivalve molluscs and RTE seafood can be found in [Schedule 27](#) of the Code. It is also important for licensed seafood businesses that receive live shellfish to ensure it is stored in a cool, dry environment and below 5°C after being shucked. Businesses require approval from PrimeSafe before wet storing or de-sanding bivalve molluscs. The requirements of wet storage can be found in ASQAP. All water used for wet storage must be potable to prevent stored bivalve mollusc from becoming contaminated by the storage water.

Using Potable Water

Potable water must be used for all activities including food processing, cleaning and hand washing at facilities where meat and seafood is stored, processed, displayed or sold. Potable water means it is safe for people to drink. Requirements for potable water are in the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines (ADWG). Potability of water must be monitored to ensure its microbiological quality and its suitability as drinking water by testing for *E. coli* in a 100ml sample of water. The water sample must not contain any *E. Coli* organisms. If the facility is sourcing water from a town water supply, then the results of the water quality should be obtained from the relevant water authority and kept as a document proving the potability of the water supply.

If water is not used from a town water supply then the licensee must obtain PrimeSafe approval for use of water from an alternative water source and prove its potability through microbiological testing. The minimum testing requirement is the absence of *E.coli* in 100mL of water every quarter (three months).

[Click here](#) for more information on the Australian Drinking Water Guideline.

Food Packaging

All licensed seafood and meat businesses when packaging meat and seafood should follow the requirements of the Code which recommends when packaging food:

- only use packaging material that is fit for its intended use;
- only use material that is not likely to cause food contamination; and
- ensure that there is no likelihood that the food may become contaminated during the packaging process.

Plastic bags are the packaging of choice for most meat and seafood processors and retailers.

The Victorian Government has implemented a state-wide ban on lightweight plastic shopping bags from 1 November 2019. The ban applies to all retailers (i.e. supermarket, restaurants and shops). The ban is applicable to all lightweight plastic shopping bags that are degradable, biodegradable and compostable bags with a thickness less than 36 micrometres (μm). It is not recommended for retailers to use plastic singlet bags just above the minimum thickness as they may have an inconsistent thickness and be non-compliant.

The National Retail Association has developed a large range of resources to assist retailers to manage the ban on lightweight plastic shopping bags, [click here](#) for official signage that can be displayed in-store to inform customers. For more information on the implementation of a state-wide ban on lightweight plastic shopping bags visit [Vic Bag Ban](#) website.

Customers may also seek the option of supplying their own recyclable plastic containers in which to receive their purchased meat and seafood. This practice is permitted and the risk assessment for this activity must be included in the licensed business's Food Safety Program.



Food Safety Programs

A free Food Safety Program for Retail Meat, Retail Seafood and Retail Smallgoods Licensees is now available from PrimeSafe.

The PrimeSafe Food Safety Program is a simplified user-friendly documented system that allows licensees to manage and meet regulatory requirements of the Australian and Victorian Standards.

PrimeSafe can work with licensees to tailor the Food Safety Program to include more complex processes, however there is a fee for this service.



Factsheets

To assist licensees, PrimeSafe has published easy to understand guidelines that include information on licensing, complex food safety issues, procedures and processes to ensure compliance with Standards and Regulations. [Click here](#) to access PrimeSafe Factsheets.

Kangaroos for Pet Food

A new Kangaroo Harvesting Program in Victoria commenced on 1 October 2019. Information on the new program administered by the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR) is available from the [Agriculture Victoria website](#).

The new Kangaroo Harvesting Program replaces the Kangaroo Pet Food Trial that had been in operation since 2014.

Field Harvesters (shooters) of kangaroos do not need to be approved by PrimeSafe. However, field harvesters must be approved by PrimeSafe before harvesting wild deer. Field harvesters of kangaroos must be approved by DJPR.



The new program continues to only permit kangaroo meat to be harvested for pet food and must be supplied to PrimeSafe licensed Pet Meat Processing facilities. Harvesting of kangaroos for human consumption remains prohibited in Victoria. All queries, complaints and concerns regarding this program should be emailed to kangarooharvesting@ecodev.vic.gov.au or by calling 136 186.

Licence renewal 2020

PrimeSafe has mailed out renewal notices to Retail Butcher Shop and Seafood Processor and Retailer licensees.

The following licence category renewals have been sent:

- Retail Butcher Shop
- Seafood Wholesaler Category A and B
- Seafood Processor Category A and B
- Seafood Further Processor Category A and B
- Seafood Retailer including vehicle/boat.

To remain licensed by PrimeSafe to operate in 2020, existing licensees are asked to renew their licences by 9 December 2019. To complete the renewal, **licensees must complete, sign and return the renewal form to PrimeSafe and pay the renewal fee.** Licensees can pay via BPay, cheque or money order. Cash and credit card payments are only accepted at the PrimeSafe office at 150 Albert Road, South Melbourne. Renewal fees cannot be paid online through the PrimeSafe website.

If you are currently in one of the above licence categories and have not received your renewal, please contact the PrimeSafe office via info@primesafe.vic.gov.au or 03 9685 7333.

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