Who is responsible for food safety in Australia?

Australia has comprehensive controls in place that protect Australians from exposure to unsafe food, according to the Department of Agriculture (Healey, J., 2016, 1-2).

There are three levels of government in the food regulatory system and each level of government plays a role in protecting public health and safety through regulating food - including imported food.

The Commonwealth Government

The Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA) sets government policy on food in consultation with Australian state and territory governments.

Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) develops food standards in line with this policy, which are then published in the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code. All imported food must meet Australian requirements (under the Quarantine Act) and is then subject to the requirements of the Imported Food Control Act.

State and Territory Governments

The state and territory governments develop and administer food legislation, which gives legal force to the requirements of the Food Standards Code. Regulation of food production at the farm level is typically covered by primary production laws. State or territory food acts usually cover food processing requirements through to retail sale requirements.

Local Government

Along with the state and territory governments, local governments are responsible for monitoring the compliance of food in their jurisdiction.

Food Labelling

The Food Standards Code currently mandates country of origin labelling for all packaged food and unpackaged fresh and processed fruit, vegetables, seafood and pork.

The Australian Consumer Law (ACL) includes a broad prohibition against misleading or deceptive conduct and a specific prohibition against representations that mislead the public as to the nature, manufacturing process and characteristics of all goods, including food.

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) is engaged in both compliance and enforcement efforts in relation to labelling claims, including country of origin claims.