

Meeting Report

Report on the Consultative Process to Prepare a Draft Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011-2015



26 to 28 October 2010
Manila, Philippines

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REPORT

ON THE CONSULTATIVE PROCESS TO PREPARE A DRAFT
WESTERN PACIFIC REGIONAL FOOD SAFETY STRATEGY 2011-2015
FOR CONSIDERATION OF THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE WESTERN PACIFIC

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NOTE

The views expressed in this report are those of the participants in the consultative process to develop the Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011-2015 and do not necessarily reflect the policies of the Organization.

This report has been prepared by the World Health Organization Regional Office for the Western Pacific for governments of Members States in the Region and for those who participated in the consultative process to develop the Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011-2015.

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Key words

Food safety/ Regional strategy/ Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011-201
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Foodborne diseases and food contamination constitute a growing public health concern as international trade in food continues to expand. In recent years, several issues have generated media and consumer attention in food handling in the Western Pacific Region, including infant formula contaminated with melamine, Ebola Reston Virus in pigs, excessively high levels of iodine in soy milk products, fish poisoning, hepatitis A associated with semidried tomatoes, pesticide residues and poisonings and chloropropanol contamination of soy sauce.

In addition, food and waterborne diarrhoeal diseases and dietary-related undernutrition and noncommunicable diseases (NCD) continue to have extensive public health, social and economic consequences. To more effectively prevent these consequences and respond in a timely manner to concerns, countries and areas in the Western Pacific Region should further strengthen their national food control systems and enhance the human, financial and technical resources committed to food safety.

The 53rd World Health Assembly, in Resolution WHA 53.15 in 2000, requested the Director-General of WHO, inter alia, to give greater emphasis to food safety and collaborate with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and other international bodies. In association with this resolution, the Western Pacific Regional Office organized a meeting on the strategic planning of food safety in the Region and Member States subsequently endorsed a Western Pacific Regional Strategy for Food Safety in 2001. This was followed by a global food safety strategy in 2002.

Subsequently, the 63rd World Health Assembly adopted Resolution 63.3 in which Member States were urged, among other key aspects, to further develop and implement the core capacities as defined in Annex 1 of the International Health Regulations (IHR) (2005), including the building of systems for surveillance for foodborne disease and food contamination; risk assessment, risk management and risk communication; food safety emergency response; product tracing and recall; and food analysis.

It was therefore considered timely to review the existing Western Pacific Regional Strategy for Food Safety and identify how Member States can best take action to strengthen food control in the next five years to reduce the risk of food contamination and foodborne diseases but also to address the double burden of undernutrition and NCD. The strategy development also should be viewed in the context of cooperative programmes for enhancing food safety and quality in Member States of the Region such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation's (APEC) Food Safety Cooperation Forum; the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' (ASEAN) Food Safety Improvement Plan; and the Food Secure Pacific Framework for Action.

This report describes the consultative process employed to ensure that any regional food safety strategy was based on both expert guidance and country needs.

2. THE CONSULTATIVE PROCESS

2.1 Assessing Pacific island needs for consideration in a Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011-2015

A technical workshop on regional strategic frameworks for food safety was held on 30 September 2011 in association with the 11th Session of the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for North America and South-west Pacific (CCNASWP) held in Nuku'alofa from 28 September to 1 October 2010 at the kind invitation of the Government of Tonga. The objectives of the technical workshop were to:

- (1) inform delegates about the Food Secure Pacific Framework for Action and discuss linkages with the CCNASWP Strategic Plan;
- (2) consult with delegates about drafting a Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy for 2011-2015; and
- (3) inform delegates about the FAO Medium Term Priority Framework for Pacific island countries. The participants attending the workshop are listed in Annex 1.

Following a joint presentation on the food safety component of the Pacific Framework for Action on Food Security by FAO and WHO, participants were introduced to the Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy for 2011-2015, which is under development, and the FAO food safety component of the multicountry national medium-term priority framework (NMTPF) (2009-2012). Following the presentations, the workshop participants split into two working groups, with one group discussing the Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy for 2011-2015 and the other reflecting on Codex systems in Pacific island countries.

Relative to the Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy for 2011-2015, the participants concluded that it was important to ensure that as the strategy was further advanced:

- (1) it remained relevant to the Pacific island countries and areas;
- (2) it was consistent with the Food Secure Pacific Framework for Action; and
- (3) it addressed legislation and enforcement but also had a focus on food safety education and training and maintained a community-based approach to such education.

2.2 Seeking expert guidance in the formulation of the Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011-2015

An expert meeting was conducted from 28 to 30 October 2010 at the Pan Pacific Hotel in Manila, Philippines. The meeting was attended by nine temporary advisers from six Member States of the Western Pacific Region, from one Member State outside the Region and by seven Secretariat members (see Annex 3).

The objectives of the expert meeting were to:

- (1) review advances in food safety systems since the endorsement of the Western Pacific Regional Strategy for Food Safety 2001; and

- (2) propose options for future strategic directions, approaches and main components of a Western Pacific Strategy for Food Safety 2011-2015, considering synergies with the Asia-Pacific Strategy for Emerging Diseases (APSED) 2010.

At the inaugural session, Dr Chen Junshi, Senior Research Professor, Institute of Nutrition and Food Safety, China, was elected Chairperson for the meeting. D. Tiberghien, WHO Representative's Office for Viet Nam, agreed to be Rapporteur.

The meeting agenda was adopted (see Annex 2) and the opening session continued with the operational officer introducing the background and objectives of the meeting and giving general guidance on the programme, small group work sessions and plenary sessions, which included group presentations and joint discussions.

The technical presentations and the group work were divided into four main sessions. Session 1 examined at all of the existing global and regional guidance, regional APEC, ASEAN and Pacific plans and progress made in strengthening food control systems since the original regional strategy was endorsed in 2001. Session 2 considered the structure, vision, goal and objectives of a revised regional strategy. Session 3 worked out guidance on core areas for action in a Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015. Session 4 further discussed future strategic directions, approaches and the main components of the Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015.

The detailed proceedings of the meeting and the list of temporary advisers, representatives and observers and the Secretariat are in Annexes 2 and 3, respectively.

2.3 In-country consultations

A number of in-country consultations were conducted in order to better ensure that the draft strategy was designed so that it was relevant to all Member States of the Region. Workshops were conducted in Cambodia, China, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mongolia and Viet Nam. In addition to formal workshops to gain feedback on the draft strategy, informal in-country discussions also were undertaken in Fiji and New Zealand.

Further, the draft Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011-2015, as drafted by the expert meeting, was presented in a Food Safety Forum held during the fourth China-Japan-Korea Tripartite Health Ministers' Meeting from 20 to 22 November 2010, which was conducted in Jeju, the Republic of Korea. There was general interest in the draft strategy and, during the health ministers' meeting, all three countries also noted the importance of continuing working towards the harmonization of food standards among the countries.

As a consequence of this broad consultation process, a number of modifications were made to the strategy drafted by the expert meeting and the modified strategy then was presented before a technical consultation. Areas of particular note included the need to ensure that the strategy realistically was structured to demonstrate progress in its five-year lifespan; the need to give appropriate consideration to actions related to micronutrient deficiencies and NCD-related issues; the emphasis on risk-based imported food control for ASEAN countries; the importance of a mechanism to facilitate combined data analysis; and the usefulness of the need among countries to share new technologies and innovative systems.

2.4 Ensuring the Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011-2015 is of relevance to Member States: A technical consultation

A technical consultation subsequently was conducted from 4 to 5 May 2011 at the Grand Dorset Subang Hotel in Subang Jaya, Malaysia. Dr Corinne Capuano, WHO Representative for Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia and Singapore, made the official opening address on behalf of Dr Shin Young-soo, WHO Regional Director for the Western Pacific.

The objectives of the technical consultation were to:

- (1) review experiences and lessons learnt from the implementation of the Western Pacific Regional Strategy for Food Safety, 2001;
- (2) review and provide technical inputs to a draft Western Pacific Regional Food Safety strategy 2011-2015; and
- (3) advise on the next steps to progress for adoption of the regional strategy by Member States.

In the inaugural session, Noraini binti Dato' Mohd Othman, Senior Director, Food Safety and Quality Division, Ministry of Health, Malaysia, was elected Chairperson for the meeting.

Jennifer Bishop, the responsible officer for the consultation, asked participants to introduce themselves. After the introduction, Bishop briefly outlined the background and objectives of the consultation. The meeting agenda (Annex 4) then was adopted.

The Technical Consultation reviewed current WHO regional and global guidance for food safety, progress made since the original regional strategy was endorsed in 2001, the draft Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011-2015, the application of the strategy's concepts in Member States and APEC, ASEAN and Pacific plans.

The detailed proceedings of the meeting and the list of temporary advisers, representatives and observers and the Secretariat are provided in Annexes 4 and 5, respectively.

3. THE DRAFT
WESTERN PACIFIC REGIONAL FOOD SAFETY STRATEGY 2011-2015
ARISING FROM THE CONSULTATIVE PROCESS
FOR CONSIDERATION OF THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE MEETING 2011

Executive Summary

Access to sufficient, nutritionally adequate and safe food is a basic human right. This right, however, is threatened by foodborne disease and food contamination, two growing public health concerns in both developed and developing countries. Diarrhoeal diseases, a significant proportion of which are foodborne, kill approximately 2.2 million people annually. Other causes of foodborne disease, such as chemical contamination, are a further burden not included in this estimate. Additionally, micronutrient deficiencies and noncommunicable diseases continue to have extensive public health, social and economic consequences.

The globalization of the world's food supply has created complex challenges for those managing food safety, with the realization that food that may have caused a local outbreak, may grow into an event of international concern. The World Health Organization (WHO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and other partners have a long history in promoting and assisting with the development of national food control systems to help ensure the safety of food.

This Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy (2011–2015) considers progress made to date and identifies priority strategic actions required in the Member States of the WHO Western Pacific Region to help ensure safe and healthy food to reduce the risk of food contamination and foodborne diseases and also to address the double burden of micronutrient deficiencies and noncommunicable diseases. Not all strategic actions included in this strategy will be put in place by each Member State over the next five years, as this is dependent on the initial stage of development in a Member State and on the resources available. While it is commonly accepted that the vision, goal and many strategic actions of the strategy will have a life span beyond 2015, a five-year timeframe has been used to allow for regular evaluation of progress made through use of the indicators and also possible future changes to the strategy. In addition, the different elements of the strategy are not expected to be implemented at the same time, as some are dependent on others being in place. The strategy also highlights the importance of collaboration, not only in and between Member States, but also between WHO, FAO, the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation's (APEC) Food Safety Cooperation Forum, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' (ASEAN) Food Safety Improvement Plan and Food Secure Pacific Framework for Action, and the associated Regional Trade Facilitation Programme to help Member States to carry out the priority actions.

¹ The WHO Western Pacific Region includes the following 37 countries and areas: Countries—Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Cook Islands, Fiji, Japan, Kiribati, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Mongolia, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Samoa, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Viet Nam. Areas—American Samoa (United States of America), French Polynesia (France), Guam (United States of America), Hong Kong (China), Macao (China), New Caledonia (France), the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (United States of America), the Pitcairn Islands (United Kingdom), Tokelau (New Zealand), Wallis and Futuna (France).

Vision – A Western Pacific Region contributing to the health of all through safe and healthy food.

Goal – By 2015, countries and areas in the Western Pacific Region will have strengthened their national food control systems and will be actively collaborating to facilitate safe and healthy food.

Objectives – To achieve the goal, the following two interrelated objectives have been identified:

- (1) In order to strengthen national food control systems, countries and areas will have taken measures, appropriate to their national situations, to ensure food safety is addressed:
 - (a) through improved food control and coordination throughout the food chain continuum and adequate funding;
 - (b) by building and optimizing risk-based regulatory frameworks;
 - (c) through improved availability of food safety data to better guide policy and risk analysis;
 - (d) by strengthening the capacity of inspection services to effectively enforce legislation;
 - (e) through effective food safety training and education; and
 - (f) by increasing the capacity to detect, assess and manage food safety incidents and emergencies.
- (2) In order to facilitate active collaboration between countries and areas and also between agencies working to assist national governments, measures will be taken by countries, areas and agencies, as appropriate:
 - (a) to minimize differences between regulatory frameworks, where such differences are unnecessary, to protect the health of people;
 - (b) to optimize the sharing of food safety information;
 - (c) to implement effective cooperation between developing and developed countries, as well as among developing countries; and
 - (d) to facilitate effective collaboration between agencies working to assist national governments to make the best use of resources.

3.1 Improved Food Control and Coordination throughout the Food Chain Continuum and Adequate Funding

3.1.1 Background

An effective national food control system is essential to protect public health, prevent fraud, avoid food adulteration and facilitate safe and healthy food, and relevant, up-to-date and enforceable food legislation is an essential part of a modern food control system. Sound laws and regulations are essential to create an enabling and predictable environment in which to develop and enforce food safety measures based on risk analysis, including risk assessment, risk management and risk communications. Food legislation protects the rights of consumers and defines the responsibilities of food producers, processors, manufacturers, traders and consumers, helping to ensure that food is safe, wholesome and fit for human

consumption. Food laws and regulations also establish clear, appropriate and fair rules that facilitate trade in food and protect consumers from fraudulent practices.

The aspirations of governments in the area of food safety policy are commonly defined in food legislation. Modern food laws and regulations need to cover the whole food chain, including production, processing and marketing. Food legislation needs to include provisions to base the national food control system on sound science and on the principles of risk analysis.

Food legislation should ensure that adequate financial resources are available to provide the necessary experienced staff and other resources for the implementation of official controls. In order to support official food controls, food legislation should also include provisions for either establishing a food laboratory network, including national reference laboratories for food monitoring and surveillance, or setting up mechanisms by which food control authorities can access an available food laboratory network. This will necessitate the allocation of central government funding, which may be offset by establishing fees or charges for official food control services.

An effective food control system requires coordinated management throughout the food chain continuum. Regulatory control of food safety is usually a responsibility shared among national, regional and local government authorities, and commitment to cooperation among all these players is essential. Food legislation, or national policy, should include unambiguous provisions that describe how these different bodies cooperate and collaborate to ensure the consistent implementation of food safety controls, and the functions and powers of all agencies involved in food control need to be clearly defined in the legislation. Furthermore, where relevant, food safety policy should be integrated with other policy areas to facilitate multisectoral action towards food safety concerns.

Experience in enforcement of food regulations internationally shows that the best standards of consumer protection are achieved when there is a separation between the national bodies that are in charge of producing food policy and legislation and those that are responsible for implementing and enforcing that legislation. Additionally, experience has demonstrated that consumers are best protected when there is a clear separation between the national agencies that are responsible for promoting and supporting the food sector and those charged with food control.

3.1.2 Strategic direction

Improve coordination of the management of food control by updating and modernizing food legislation and/or formal policy agreements so that unambiguous provisions describe how the different national bodies and agencies should cooperate and collaborate to ensure the consistent implementation of food safety controls and how these same bodies and agencies will be adequately resourced to effectively implement food control.

3.1.3 Strategic actions

National food control authorities, in partnership with other key stakeholders, will carry out the following strategic actions:

- (1) Review the nature, scope and substance of policy, laws, regulations and standards related to food and how the existing laws and regulations (at central, regional and local levels) govern the production, processing, handling, distribution, import/export and sale of food.
- (2) For gaps identified in laws, regulations and standard, introduce appropriate measures.

- (3) Establish in legislation, or by formal policy agreement, a coordination mechanism to oversee food safety throughout the food chain continuum.
- (4) Ensure that adequate financial resources are made available to provide the necessary staff and other resources for effective implementation of official controls.

3.1.4 Indicator

Legislation enacted, or a formal policy agreement in place, that includes provisions for setting up a coordination mechanism to oversee food safety throughout the food chain continuum and adequate financial resources in all Member States of the WHO Western Pacific Region.

3.2. Risk-Based Regulatory Frameworks

3.2.1 Background

Collaboration of all stakeholders along the food chain continuum is essential to ensure a comprehensive and integrated approach to safe and healthy food. In recent years, food production, processing and marketing systems have grown more complex and the length of the food chain continuum has expanded globally.

The primary responsibility for the production of safe food is that of food businesses. Each food business must ensure that control systems are in place to prevent, eliminate or reduce risks to consumers to acceptable levels at all stages of the food chain continuum for which they have responsibility, and that legislative requirements are met by such systems.

To complement and support the efforts of food businesses, national governments must organize and implement adequate and effective regulatory frameworks. Regulatory frameworks include: (1) primary legislation that includes definitions, roles and responsibilities, and also the principles of food control; (2) food regulations and standards that define the rules that regulate the production, processing, storage, distribution, marketing, import/export and sale of food, reflecting food safety, noncommunicable disease and micronutrient deficiency issues; and (3) codes of practice that assist food businesses in implementing the regulations and standards by identifying acceptable controls.

Controls that act as incentives to food businesses, such as scoring systems and risk-based inspection frequencies, are effective in influencing food businesses to control the safety of their food. It is therefore essential that food businesses, at all levels, engage in proactive dialogue with regulatory bodies to agree on food safety regulations and standards and ensure efficient and effective integration of industry and official food safety control systems.

A key role of government departments and agencies is to develop regulatory and non-regulatory measures to protect public health and consumer interests and to facilitate trade. The development of food regulatory measures should be based on the best available scientific evidence and data, and should be managed and communicated appropriately. Risk analysis frameworks are commonly used at national and international levels as the basis for developing food regulations and standards.

A risk analysis framework provides a structured way of examining and incorporating the wide variety of factors that impact on the decision-making process and enables regulators to identify, assess, manage and communicate food-related health risks (including foodborne disease, micronutrient deficiencies and noncommunicable disease) throughout the food chain continuum. Risk analysis can be used across a broad range of circumstances and can lead to effective management strategies, even when

available data are limited. Risk communication is an essential means for sharing information on hazards and risks among all interested parties.

3.2.2 Strategic direction

Focus industry and official food safety control systems and actions on the assurance that consumers have access to safe and healthy food; robust regulatory frameworks will be developed based on risk analysis and a broad consultative process.

3.2.3 Strategic actions

National food control authorities, in partnership with other key stakeholders, will carry out the following strategic actions.

- (1) Strengthen the development of risk-based regulatory frameworks and encourage partnerships with all relevant stakeholders, through the following steps:
 - (a) Review, revise and consult on food regulations and standards to ensure that they are risk-based, consistent with internationally developed and agreed standards, such as those of the Codex Alimentarius Commission and OIE,² and facilitate the trade of safe and healthy food.
 - (b) Develop codes of practice, guidance documents and training materials on legislation (laws, regulations and standards) for distribution to all relevant stakeholders to ensure effective and consistent enforcement nationally.
- (2) Strengthen the capability of food control authorities in the area of risk communications by developing risk communications strategies and enhancing the expertise and skills of food safety professionals.
- (3) Facilitate the sharing of experiences on the development of risk-based regulatory frameworks among countries and areas through a diversity of mechanisms, including existing regional networks such as ASEAN forums, the APEC Food Safety Cooperation Forum, and the Pacific Food Safety and Quality Legislation Expert Group.
- (4) Contribute to risk-based imported food control through the sharing of information on offshore assurances between countries and areas.
- (5) Strengthen Codex participation through mentoring programmes that match up countries that have a well-developed process for contributing to the work of Codex and countries that are still developing such a process.
- (6) Where possible, use the same risk-based frameworks to assist in addressing dietary/nutritional issues, such as micronutrient deficiencies and noncommunicable diseases, including:

² The OIE and the Codex Alimentarius (CAC) are two of the three international standard-setting organizations recognized under the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (the SPS Agreement). In the context of the SPS Agreement, the OIE is responsible for setting standards in the domain of animal health (including zoonotic diseases) and the CAC in the domain of food safety.

- (a) supporting micronutrient fortification of specific foods; and
- (b) working in partnership with the relevant food sectors on initiatives to reduce the fat, sugar and salt content of foods.

3.2.4 Indicators

- (1) Risk-based food safety regulatory frameworks in place in Member States of the WHO Western Pacific Region.
- (2) Risk communications mechanisms in place for the interactive exchange of information between stakeholders in Member States of the WHO Western Pacific Region.

3.3. Improved Availability of Food Safety Data to Better Guide Policy and Risk Analysis

3.3.1 Background

Modern food safety control systems, in order to be efficient, rely increasingly on the availability and use of data and information on foodborne disease and food contamination (pathogens, toxins and harmful chemicals), as well as data on the performance of controls throughout the food chain.

Access to reliable and current intelligence on the incidence of foodborne disease is critical. Therefore, it is essential that effective links are established between food control agencies and the public health system. In this way, information on food contamination from food monitoring can be linked with foodborne disease data, and can lead to early warning and appropriate risk-based food control policies. Essential information includes annual incidence trends, identification of susceptible population groups, identification of hazardous foods (including ingredients and food-producing animals), and identification and tracing of causes of foodborne diseases. Only with such information can the aspects of hazard identification, hazard characterization, exposure assessment and risk characterization—integral to a sound scientific risk assessment—be achieved, and only through a sound scientific risk assessment can effective risk reduction measures be identified. Additionally, the data can also be used to monitor the effective implementation and impact of such control measures.

The credibility of a national food control system depends on the quality of data and on the capabilities of those within the system to analyse and act upon those data. Being able to make the most of limited data by performing trend analysis, modelling and forecasting has become equally important in reducing the currently large burden of foodborne disease and facilitating an increasingly global food trade.

Having access to laboratories that can detect, identify and quantify a country's priority hazards, that have effective analytical quality assurance programmes, and that have been accredited by an appropriate accreditation agency, is an essential component of a food control system. Such laboratories may be either public or private and may be within a country's borders or outside, but they must be readily accessible when urgent analyses are required. Considerable capital investment is needed to establish, maintain and operate laboratories. Therefore careful planning is necessary to achieve optimum results. The quantity and locations of the laboratories should be determined in relation to the objectives of the system and the volume of work. Resources should not be wasted by creating underutilized laboratory services.

3.3.2 Strategic direction

Introduce a systematic effort to collect, analyse and interpret data on food contaminants and food consumption and establish effective links with the public health system to improve the availability of attributable data on foodborne disease.

3.3.3 Strategic actions

National food control authorities, in partnership with other key stakeholders, will carry out the following strategic actions:

- (1) Establish effective links with the public health system to improve the availability of attributable data on foodborne disease through event-based and indicator-based surveillance.
- (2) Establish effective links between different data sources to facilitate the assessment of combined data and increase efforts to share data between agencies and internationally, where it is appropriate to do so, for improved risk management.
- (3) Develop the capacity to conduct studies on the burden of foodborne disease and share data obtained from any completed studies for strengthened national risk analysis and advocacy for food safety.
- (4) Strengthen the capacity of designated national agencies to conduct targeted food consumption surveillance and to monitor food hazards of public health significance through national food contaminant and residue monitoring programmes, including total diet studies.
- (5) Establish, or identify through mapping, a network of food laboratories (within or outside national borders) with the capacity to detect, identify and quantify chemical and microbiological hazards to support national and international risk assessment efforts.

3.3.4 Indicators

- (1) Links established with the public health system to improve the availability of data on foodborne disease through event-based surveillance and indicator-based surveillance in all Member States of the WHO Western Pacific Region.
- (2) A plan and a programme of work for collecting, analysing, interpreting and applying food safety data to improve the management of risks associated with priority hazards are in place in all Member States of the WHO Western Pacific Region.

3.4. Inspection Services

3.4.1 Background

Food inspection is a critical component of a national food control system, as it aims to ensure that food being sold meets the safety requirements defined by food legislation. To meet this aim, food inspectors must be qualified, trained, efficient, honest and transparent in their activities. Modern food inspections incorporate risk, so that efforts are focused on food businesses who are most likely to provide unsafe food and also uncontrolled hazards of greatest public health concern, and so that the inspectors' actions will have the greatest impact on the safety of food sold.

Food inspectors are often the face of a national food control system for the food industry and the public. Therefore their training is critical and must be reflective of food inspection needs. To this end, FAO and WHO advocate that proper training of food inspectors is a prerequisite for an efficient food control system.³ The development of food inspectors' capacities is reliant on partnerships between national food control authorities and institutes that can offer specialized training. Up-to-date food safety information can be integrated into the training programme.

Food inspectors operate within food inspection services. The following components support the inspection process and ensure effective, non-biased, credible inspections: adequate resources; in-service training on emergent food safety issues and new concepts in food safety; food business training and consultation on inspection requirements and priority food safety issues; standard operating procedures for undertaking inspections, including defining priority issues for inspection; process for defining risk-based inspection frequencies; audit of inspection activities; record management of previous inspections and corrective follow-up action; legal support; calibration processes between inspectors to ensure consistency and as a means of training and access to legislation; inspection equipment; and laboratory services.

Food inspection services can be strengthened at all levels of government by utilizing internationally recognized standards, guidelines and approaches; learning from other Member States' services; and implementing consistent actions across all national agencies responsible for food safety, while avoiding duplication and gaps in inspection services across the food chain continuum.

3.4.2 Strategic direction

Establish competent food control authorities as independent and trusted public health bodies, and contribute to effective national food control systems through the strengthening of risk-based food inspection services.

3.4.3 Strategic actions

National food control authorities, in partnership with other key stakeholders, will carry out the following strategic actions.

- (1) On a regional and national basis, identify core competencies for food inspection, reflecting inspection needs throughout the food chain continuum (including imported food), and for specific non-routine activities (e.g. foodborne disease outbreaks, food recalls and mass gatherings). Build on existing courses, strengthen training courses for food inspectors and develop in-service training programmes for current inspectors to reflect core competencies, and include training requirements in national legislation.
- (2) Noting the challenges for Pacific island countries and other countries that cannot sustain a national training institute, develop a subregional approach for delivery of the required training.
- (3) Undertake a national critical review to identify strengths, weaknesses and areas of improvement required in food inspection services and take action on priority areas of improvement.

³ FAO/WHO (2003). Assuring Food Safety and Quality: Guidelines for national food control systems. Food and Agriculture Organization, FAO Food and Nutrition Paper 76.

- (4) Ensure continual upgrading of the skills of food inspectors through in-service training and further development of food inspection services through sharing of experiences at regional and subregional meetings and other forums.
- (5) Building on existing platforms, participate in networks of relevant training institutes and food control authorities to gather input on the above actions.

3.4.4 Indicators

- (1) Food inspector training programmes, reflecting core competencies, are required by national legislation and are implemented in Member States of the WHO Western Pacific Region.
- (2) Increased uptake of the use of risk-based food inspection systems in place in Member States of the WHO Western Pacific Region.

3.5. Food Safety Training and Education

3.5.1 Background

Food safety training and education are important contributors in raising people's awareness of food safety issues and increasing the capacity of people to handle food more safely and to make healthier food choices.

To enhance food safety awareness, a range of strategies can be undertaken by food safety control authorities, including web-based consumer awareness strategies; intensive awareness-raising campaigns, such as food safety awareness weeks or months; and campaigns carried out through existing community mechanisms and/or use of the media.

To impact on food handling behaviours, however, food safety education and training should be based on a better understanding of the underlying social determinants and food-related behaviours, as well as on clear identification of potential hazards and their control measures. Following these initial steps, food safety trainers and educators also need to apply optimum behaviour-impact education processes, including the prioritization of behaviours for change. Furthermore, if food safety education is to achieve its goal, programmes must be targeted at, and constructed for, particular audiences.

Efforts to enhance food safety education and training should also be focused on specific at-risk population groups and food businesses employed in the handling of high-risk foods. At-risk groups that are education priorities include women who are pregnant or caring for infants, as well as those caring for the elderly and chronically ill. Children, too, must be targeted. To increase safe food handling among children, food safety needs to become a key element within school curricula, be an integral part of school policies, and be central to the provision of food to schoolchildren. Producers, processors, food handlers, food retailers, food traders and those preparing food for and caring for vulnerable populations also all need to understand the factors that can influence the safety of the food they handle, as well as their moral responsibility to ensure the safety of any raw material, semi-processed material, ingredient, additive or food during their care of it.

Partnerships with training programmes and initiatives already in place for identified priority audiences should be utilized as an effective means of delivering training (such as Healthy School programmes and use of midwives and community support groups for mothers).

Having competent and capable trainers and educators is critical to the success of any training and education programme. Trainers trained in key food safety messages and how such messages can be used to increase safe food handling and safe food choices are essential to any effective programme for improving safe food handling and increasing the ability of individuals and communities to make safe food choices. Education programmes should also include an evaluation process to measure their effectiveness and improve them as necessary.

3.5.2 Strategic direction

While recognizing the importance of food safety education and training for all stakeholders, intensify the food safety education and training programme for priority groups, including women of reproductive age, pregnant women, mothers and carers of infants and young children, schoolchildren (pre-school, primary and secondary), and health workers and carers of the elderly, immunocompromised and chronically ill. Require mandatory food safety training for food handlers in those businesses handling high-risk foods. To achieve maximum impact and sustainability, build partnerships and links with existing health education programmes and with those who can facilitate an enabling environment for improved safe food handling. In addition, to improve training and education and maximize its effectiveness, ensure evaluation processes are integral components of programmes.

3.5.3 Strategic actions

National food control authorities, in partnership with other key stakeholders, will carry out the following strategic actions to enhance food safety training and education at all levels (national, provincial and local).

- (1) Review existing programmes to assess their ability to provide adequate and effective food safety education for priority groups⁴ and revise and implement more targeted programmes to ensure they reach poor and vulnerable populations. With regard to infant and young children feeding practices, first review common practices nationally then identify priority actions for risk reduction to better direct food safety education, develop guidance on safer practices, and introduce programmes aimed at increasing the safety of such feeding practices.
- (2) Review and revise pre-school and school policies, programmes and curricula to increase attention to food safety and improve the capacity of children to make safe food choices and to handle food more safely.
- (3) To maximize the impact of food safety training and education, increase the competency and capability of trainers and educators by training them in key food safety messages and how such messages can best be developed and delivered.
- (4) Strengthen food safety training for all food handlers in food businesses producing, processing and trading food along the food chain and make mandatory, appropriate-level food safety training programmes targeted at food handlers engaged in food businesses handling high-risk foods.
- (5) Build partnerships and links with existing health education programmes and with those who can facilitate an enabling environment for improved safe food handling.

⁴ Priority groups are specified in the strategic directions section.

- (6) Apply mechanisms, including existing regional and international training initiatives, to build links between government, industry and trainers to bring together resources to enhance and sustain food safety education.

3.5.4 Indicators

- (1) Food safety education and training programmes set up to be targeted and effective and to reach priority groups.
- (2) Partnerships identified and applied to enhance food safety education and training outcomes.
- (3) Food safety training for food handlers engaged in handling high-risk food required by legislation and an implementation process in place.

3.6. Capacity to Detect, Assess and Manage Food Safety Incidents and Emergencies

3.6.1 Background

The protection of public health, through the provision of safe food, is the objective of national food control systems. However, even with the most developed food control system, such systems fail from time to time and unsafe food is sold, leading to foodborne disease. In some cases, emergencies will arise because of the severity of the disease, the extent of the distribution and/or volume of the contaminated food, or the system's inability to effectively manage the situation. To limit the public health, economic and societal impacts of food safety emergencies, national governments must be able to detect, assess and manage food safety incidents and emergencies. These capacities are also considered core capacities, as defined by the International Health Regulations (2005).

A food safety emergency response plan is an integral part of a national food control system and draws upon many components to be effective. A multidisciplinary approach is essential to all public health emergencies and, as such, the food safety emergency response plan should interface with other emergency response systems.

Risk analysis for urgent food safety events provides a framework to assess the risk of a food safety incident or emergency, to develop risk management options proportionate to risk, and to communicate the likely risk to stakeholders, including consumers and industry affected by the incident or emergency. Applying the principles of risk analysis ensures a consistent, effective approach to the management of food safety emergencies, which will engender consumer and industry confidence in the actions undertaken by the food safety authority. The development of systems that provide risk management options before an emergency occurs, such as traceability and recall, is an integral step in food safety emergency preparedness.

The international distribution of food and global travel are commonplace in today's society; therefore food safety must be tackled, not only at the national level, but also internationally through the sharing of information among national food control authorities. The International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN), an FAO/WHO initiative, facilitates sharing of such information.

3.6.2 Strategic direction

Contribute to health security by enhancing capacities to detect, assess and manage food safety incidents and emergencies at national and international levels. This will be achieved through sharing relevant expertise, resources and information globally, regionally and subregionally.

3.6.3 Strategic actions

National food control authorities, in partnership with other key stakeholders, will carry out the following strategic actions:

- (1) Develop and update food safety emergency response plans, linking to other emergency plans where appropriate. Test such plans through national and international food safety emergency simulations.
- (2) Develop or strengthen event detection systems, risk analysis capacities and food traceability and recall systems for food incidents and emergencies.
- (3) Actively participate in INFOSAN, through (a) the timely communication of information relating to food safety incidents and emergencies of international interest, and (b) establishing agreements between the National IHR Focal Point and the INFOSAN Emergency Contact Point on their roles and responsibilities.
- (4) Support the WHO Western Pacific Regional Office in its work to identify likely incidents and emergencies with food safety components in the Region and develop guidelines outlining standard responses for food safety components, for modification and implementation at the national level. Identify incidents and emergencies that may occur at the national level and, utilizing the guidelines, prepare for such events.

3.6.4 Indicators

- (1) Active participation in INFOSAN by all Member States of the WHO Western Pacific Region.
- (2) Food safety emergency response plans in place and tested and updated as needed in Member States of the WHO Western Pacific Region.

3.7. Enhanced Cooperative Planning and Implementation of Regional and Subregional Food Safety Strategies and Action Plans

3.7.1 Background

There is a need to improve food safety within the Western Pacific Region, to increase protection of consumers' health and to facilitate food trade through the collaborative efforts of Member States. This will contribute to the integration and coordination of activities to support capacity-building in food safety at the national level, harmonization of legislation among Member States to facilitate trade, and implementation of joint regional activities in food safety to support national efforts in food control.

3.7.2 Strategic direction

Develop mechanisms for coordination, planning and implementation of regional, subregional and bilateral food safety strategies and action plans to maximize outcomes, minimize duplication and enhance the efficiency of resource management.

3.7.3 Strategic actions

- (1) Establish a food safety cooperation working group among key representatives of the APEC Food Safety Cooperation Forum, ASEAN Expert Group on Food Safety, the Food Secure

Pacific Framework for Action Working Group, and international organizations, such as FAO, OIE and WHO, to share information and coordinate regional and subregional plans and strategies, with the aim of building on existing strategies and plans in a coordinated manner.

- (2) The working group will initiate a forum (including physical meetings, teleconferencing and electronic dialogues, as appropriate) to facilitate discussion and progress toward coordinated planning.
- (3) Through the forum mechanisms, the working group will strive to obtain the commitment of relevant bodies:
 - (a) to map the current food safety control situation in Member States;
 - (b) to map existing regional, subregional and national programmes aimed at building food safety capacities at all levels;
 - (c) to give consideration to conducting regional risk assessment processes, utilizing regional expertise, through expert consultations and other mechanisms, as appropriate;
 - (d) to move towards an outcome-based coordinated planning process that prevents duplication of effort and ensures the best use of resources; and
 - (e) to collaborate in engaging donor agencies and development banks so that funding and activities contribute to identified outcomes.
- (4) At an agreed time, involve other key stakeholders, including aid agencies and development banks, in working group activities, as and when appropriate.
- (5) Contribute to global health security by strengthening food safety capacities through sharing of information and experiences, including information on new technologies and innovative systems developed to assist in food control, and establish effective partnerships between developing and developed countries, as well as among developing countries.

3.7.4 Indicators

- (1) A functioning food safety cooperation working group set up to coordinate food safety activities in the Western Pacific Region.
- (2) Effective partnerships established and reinforced in Member States of the WHO Western Pacific Region.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS AND SECRETARIAT
ATTENDING WORKSHOP ON A REGIONAL FOOD SAFETY FRAMEWORKS
HELD IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE
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EXPERT MEETING ON A WESTERN PACIFIC
REGIONAL FOOD SAFETY STRATEGY 2011-2015

2.4.1 Agenda

The agenda of the expert meeting was approved by the meeting. The agenda is detailed below:

- (1) Opening session
- (2) Session 1: Guidance on and advances in food safety, 2001–2010
- (3) Session 2: Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015: Structure, vision, goal and objectives
- (4) Session 3: Core areas for action in the Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015
- (5) Session 4: Future strategic directions, approaches and main components of the Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015
- (6) Closing remarks

2.4.2 Opening ceremony

Dr Takeshi Kasai provided the opening remarks on behalf of the WHO Regional Director for the Western Pacific, Dr Shin Young-soo. In his opening address, Dr Kasai noted that foodborne disease and food contamination are growing public health concerns. The globalization of the world's food supply has created complex challenges for those involved in managing food safety. In recent years, several crises in the Western Pacific Region have generated media and consumer interest in food safety. Dr Kasai cautioned that cholera and typhoid continue to spread through unsafe food handling and have devastating implications for Member States. In addition to foodborne diseases, dietary-related undernutrition and NCD continue to have extensive public health, social and economic consequences.

Dr Kasai stressed that the next three days were critical in the formulation of the Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy for 2011-2015 and that the goal is to build a strategy that will improve public health through the reduction of foodborne disease, dietary-related undernutrition and NCD related to food. He emphasized that the needs of all countries and areas in the Region need to be considered.

The Western Pacific Region includes not only the world's most populous country but some of least-populated small-island nations. Regardless of size, all countries deserve due consideration in this strategy. He asked the experts to consider what is feasible in the five-year lifespan of the strategy and to consider possible linkages with the recently-endorsed APSED (2010). Synergies with activities in APEC, ASEAN, the Framework for Action on Food Security in the Pacific and other Pacific initiatives should, as appropriate, be integrated.

Dr Kasai emphasized that WHO long has recognized the importance of food safety. A recent review by the Western Pacific Regional Office highlighted the responsibility of the Regional Office to support Member States in implementing the expanded multihazard mandate of the IHR (2005) to support the strengthening of cross-border protection. Synergies in the work of the Emerging Disease Surveillance and Response, Food Safety, and Emergency and Humanitarian Action units to meet this mandate were identified and led to the creation of the new Division of Health Security and Emergencies in the Western Pacific Regional Office. The formation of this new division seeks to more effectively and efficiently prevent, prepare for and respond to acute public health threats, including those of food origin, in order to better protect communities in the Region.

Dr Kasai concluded by expressing his interest in hearing the participants' views on how WHO can work with the food safety experts to best support the 37 countries and areas in the Region and how to implement the final strategy.

2.4.3 Proceedings of the expert meeting

Session 1: Guidance on and advances in food safety 2001– 2010

In order to provide the invited experts with a historical foundation and Regional context for their subsequent considerations, a number of presentations were provided on existing global and regional food safety strategies and on ASEAN, APEC and Pacific island developments and plans in the area of food safety. In addition, experts were advised of advances in food safety in the Western Pacific Region between 2001 and 2010.

Anthony Hazzard, Regional Adviser in Food Safety, Western Pacific Regional Office, reminded the experts that World Health Assembly Resolution 53.15, adopted in 2000, recognized the importance of food safety control as an essential public health function and urged Member States to provide adequate resources to ensure that food safety programmes had effective core components in place, including risk-based legislation, coordinated enforcement, surveillance and contaminant monitoring and food safety education.

Hazzard also noted that in response to this resolution, the Regional Committee for the Western Pacific Region of WHO adopted in 2001 a Regional Strategy for Food Safety with the aim of raising awareness of the true public health, social and economic burdens presented by foodborne diseases; promoting international standards with respect to food safety; strengthening the capacity of Member States to monitor and reduce the incidence of foodborne diseases and their impact on the Region's communities; and advocating the rights of each individual to have access to safe food. To achieve these aims, the regional strategy provided for 10 core areas of work.

In addition, experts were asked to consider the recent endorsement of the APSED and APSED 2010 -- a biregional strategy to provide a common framework for countries to strengthen their capacity to manage emerging disease threats. The experts were asked to recognize the areas in which APSED 2010 would support food safety in such a way that there would be no need to include additional guidance in the proposed regional food safety strategy.

Dr Paul Brent, Chief Scientist, Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ), gave a presentation about APEC's current efforts in strengthening food safety in member economies through the APEC Food Safety Cooperation Forum (FSCF), which was established in April 2007 in Hunter Valley, Australia. In forming the FSCF, APEC member economies agreed to work together to build robust food safety systems to accelerate progress towards harmonizing food standards with international standards and to improve public health and facilitate trade.

The forum is cochaired by Australia (FSANZ) and China (General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine of the People's Republic of China (AQSIQ)). In fulfilling its broad purpose to improve public health and facilitate trade, the goals of the FSCF are to establish transparent information-sharing and communication networks; to harmonize food safety standards, to the extent possible, with international standards and encourage food safety systems consistent with World Trade Organization (WTO) Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Agreements; and to enhance skills and human resource capacities to enable the establishment of national food safety regulatory systems that are harmonized with international standards.

At its second meeting in 2009, attended by 18 member economies, the forum noted that it had achieved successes in raising the profile of food safety, enhancing communication about food safety issues and information-sharing among economies. It has focused on building capacity in a number of areas, including risk analysis; risk assessment; risk communication; the adoption of food laws, standards and enforcement systems; and food safety incident management and undertaking food recalls.

It has supported the establishment of the FSCF Partnership Training Institute Network (PTIN), which is unique in APEC because it is a cooperative mechanism that engages industry and academic experts with regulators. Efforts related to the forum are guided by an FSCF Implementation Plan 2007-2011, the Singapore Statement 2009 and the APEC Food Safety Cooperation Forum 2009. Future work of the forum is focused on areas such as creating linkages with the World Bank, enhancing links between food safety and food security and conducting the Food Safety Cooperation Forum Meeting in 2011, as well as associated workshops. Brent said the FSCF is focused on a strategic regional approach to improve food safety and public health outcomes and encourages participation of all countries in the Region, including lower-income countries.

Noraini Dato' Mohd Othman, Ministry of Health, Malaysia, gave a presentation on ASEAN's mechanisms and efforts in strengthening food safety in Member States. She noted that the ASEAN bodies that undertake substantive work on food safety are the ASEAN Expert Group on Food Safety (AEGFS); the ASEAN Task Force on Codex (ATFC); the ASEAN Food Safety Network (AFSN); and the ASEAN Consultative Committee on Standards and Quality Prepared Foodstuff Product Working Group (ACCSQ PFPWG).

The AEGFS is a forum to address food safety issues of importance in ASEAN, including capacity-building to strengthen food safety programmes. Through the ASEAN Food Safety Improvement Plan (AFSIP), which comprises of the ASEAN Food Safety Policy and Plan of Action, AEGFS strives to coordinate the work of food safety in ASEAN to avoid duplication and overlapping. The ATFC provides a forum at which ASEAN's common positions on Codex are formulated and promotes harmonization of national regulatory standards with Codex.

The AFSN coordinates information-sharing about food safety in ASEAN. The ACCSQ PFPWG addresses the elimination of technical barriers to trade by exchanging information about ASEAN Member States' mandatory requirements; identifying areas for possible harmonization and microbiological risk assessments; and identifying technical infrastructure for testing and conformity assessment. Noraini Dato' Mohd Othman further said it would be beneficial for ASEAN to strengthen collaborative efforts in food safety with WHO and other partners.

Ethel Lano Mapolu, Chief Health Inspector – Codex Contact Point, National Food Safety, Inspection & Certification Unit, Environment Health Division, Ministry of Health and Medical Services, Solomon Islands, reported on Pacific island countries and the area's initiatives dealing with food safety. She noted that at the 39th Pacific Islands Forum meeting in Niue, in August 2008, the Forum Island leaders acknowledged the major importance of food security as an emerging issue, which poses

challenges for the future well-being of people across the Region, and committed their governments to take immediate action to address food security issues nationally and, where possible, regionally through a range of measures across key sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, trade and transport. Food security in this context was understood to include food safety.

Mapolu also reported that a Food Secure Pacific Framework for Action was adopted by high-level officials from the Pacific at a Pacific Food Summit conducted in Port Vila, Vanuatu, in April 2010. This Framework for Action, along with the Pacific Regional Trade Facilitation Programme and Pacific trade agreements, were important drivers for strengthening food safety control in the Pacific.

To provide an additional frame of reference for the experts, before they initiated considerations dealing with a regional strategy, Noraini Dato' Mohd Othman reminded the meeting of the FAO/WHO Guidelines for Strengthening National Food Control Systems and reconfirmed the five core elements of a national food control programme

- (1) food law and regulations;
- (2) food control management;
- (3) inspection services;
- (4) laboratory services; and
- (5) information, education, communication and training.

Following this presentation, a number of speakers assessed the progress made since 2001 in these five core elements. A multiagency system existed in most countries in the Western Pacific Region in 2001 with, in many instances, limited coordination and cooperation among the agencies and organizations. For better cooperation and coordination along the length of the food chain, the New South Wales (NSW) Food Authority and New Zealand Food Safety Authority (NZFSA) were established as efforts to move to "single agency" systems. New Zealand re-examined the situation in mid-2010 and amalgamated the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and NZFSA into one ministry so that it could span the full primary industries value chain from producer to consumer.

In addition, China has established a coordination commission at the State Council level; Japan established a food safety commission; and Australia and New Zealand have the Food Regulation Ministerial Council. Solomon Islands have endorsed an integrated food safety, food security and nutrition policy that seeks to enhance cooperation on not only food safety but also food security. In contrast, the Philippines and Viet Nam are applying or considering applying vertical, commodity-based agency management systems. However, it would be acceptable to judge that most countries and areas still apply multiagency systems with a need for continuing attention to better coordination and cooperation along the length of the food production, processing and distribution chain.

It was noted in relation to food law and food regulations that the primary legislation exists in most countries in some form. But it was clear that a few countries were reviewing their legislation to modernize it and to enhance clarity regarding roles and responsibilities. These include China, New Zealand, Samoa and Viet Nam. Also, while the more higher-income countries have regulations and standards harmonized to a varying degree with Codex and constantly are updating such legislation, many of the others are at different levels of development. ASEAN countries are under trade pressure to harmonize their standards, as do other countries and areas, such as those in the Pacific. In the latter situation, Codex-based

regulations and standards have been adopted in Fiji and Solomon Islands and are being worked out in the Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Tuvalu, Cook Islands and Niue.

Inspection services in most locations do not focus on food safety. There are specialized inspection services in Cambodia and Mongolia that address many commodities and aspects of life. In much of the Pacific, inspectors are trained in environmental health and are involved in development approvals, pollution control and many other aspects of environmental health. Inspectors look also at pharmaceuticals in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. Inspectors are not commonly able to implement risk-based enforcement, are not commonly well-trained in responding to incidents and emergencies and are not generally well-supported with resources that permit effective inspection. In addition, the levels of qualifications expected of inspectors are quite varied.

Laboratory services, too, are well-developed and well-used in only a few countries. Instead they are absent or limited in capacity and lack good quality assurance procedures in most Western Pacific Region countries and areas. The availability and use of data to drive policy is limited as a result of these poor laboratory services and disease surveillance programmes that pay little attention to foodborne diseases.

Food safety education is also less developed than nutrition education in most countries and areas of the Region. Some of the higher-income countries have useful initiatives to enhance consumer education, including agency-based information dissemination, communication centres, food safety months and basic food safety messages for schoolchildren and other vulnerable populations. However, across the Region, few countries and areas have incorporated key food safety messages in primary and secondary schools and most regulatory agencies have limited resources to commit to effective and adequate food safety education. Effective food recall systems exist in fewer than 50% of the Western Pacific Regional Office's Member States and a few have food safety emergency response systems in place. The lack of development in this area suggests that food safety incidents and emergencies may not be managed effectively, which impacts on the public health of the country or area affected and also trading partners.

Supported by these presentations, the experts conducted a round-table discussion to review advances in food safety systems since the endorsement of the Western Pacific Regional Strategy on Food Safety 2001 and to identify lessons learnt. As a result of these discussions and the earlier presentations, the experts were better prepared to guide the preparation of a proposed Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011-2015.

Session 2: Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015: Structure, vision, goal and objectives, goal

In Session 2, Hazzard outlined the following core areas for consideration:

(1) Obtaining government commitment to provide adequate funding and to require coordinated management throughout the food chain continuum.

(2) Strengthening regulatory frameworks developed in consultation with consumers, the food industry and other key stakeholders, which are based on risk, internationally-recognized standards, international trade agreements and recognition that responsibility for safe food production and processing lies with the food industry.

(3) Improving the availability of food safety data to better guide policy and risk analysis.

(4) Enhancing effective food safety education and training and risk communication.

(5) Building the capacity of inspection services to effectively enforce legislation.

(6) Enhancing the capacities to detect, assess and respond to food safety events.

In addition, Hazzard noted that there is a need to enhance regional coordination and cooperation. He advised the temporary advisers that for each core area they were to consider they should address an introduction, vision, goal and objectives, reasoning and need, key strategic actions for consideration and indicators and measurements for success. He further asked temporary advisers to consider global and regional guidance, to look at the vision and goal, to consider the guidance included in the papers and presentations, to crystallize the strategic themes further and to agree on what can go forward to countries for their consideration and further suggestions.

Bishop provided the experts with guidance on the need for a vision, goal and objectives for the proposed Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011-2015 and subsequently led a round-table discussion in which the experts discussed possible visions for the Region. Such visions considered a situation in which public health is improved through a reduced prevalence of food-related diseases and a reduction in food contamination events of public health significance in which public health is improved through the reduction of foodborne disease by the strengthening of national food control systems and collaboration among Member States.

Experts also discussed possible goals for the proposed Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011-2015. Discussions generally focused on a time-specific goal whereby countries and areas in the Region will have strengthened their national food control systems and will be collaborating with each other to enhance food safety and facilitate trade in safe food. Objectives considered included countries and areas taking measures, appropriate to their national situation, that ensure food safety is addressed:

(1) By government commitment to food safety through adequate funding and coordinated management throughout the food chain continuum.

(2) By strengthening regulatory frameworks developed in consultation with consumers, the food industry and other key stakeholders, which are based on risk, internationally-recognized standards, international trade agreements and encompasses the recognition that responsibility for safe food production and processing lies with the food industry.

(3) Through improved availability of food safety data to better guide policy and risk analysis.

(4) Through effective food safety training and education.

(5) Through building the capacity of inspection services to enforce legislation effectively.

(6) By enhancing capacities to detect, assess and respond to food safety events.

In addition, the experts discussed the need to promote safer food for all and facilitate the safety of food in international trade, countries and areas and the need to minimize differences in regulatory frameworks, where such differences are unnecessary to protect the health of people; to optimize the sharing of food safety information; and to implement effective cooperation among lower- and higher-income countries.

Session 3: Core areas for action in the Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015

In Session 3, experts provided guidance on core areas for action in the proposed Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011-2015.

Dr Eiji Hinoshita, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, Japan, provided guidance on the enhancement of government commitment and funding for food safety. He noted that government commitment is essential for food safety control and reminded fellow temporary advisers that for greater government commitment and funding to food safety there was a need for a clear food safety programme strategy and plan. He said further that such a strategy and plan should be based on the scientific data; be planned for effective and efficient enforcement; take into consideration public-private partnerships and actions; allow for appropriate allotment of budgets among responsible ministries; and allow for effective risk communication among stakeholders.

Prof Alan Reilly, Chief Executive, Food Safety Authority of Ireland, introduced the need to modernize food laws and coordination mechanisms to ensure that food is regulated consistently throughout the food chain continuum. He explained that food legislation protects the rights of consumers and defines the responsibilities of food producers, processors, manufacturers, traders and consumers, helping to ensure that food is safe, wholesome and fit for human consumption. While food control is usually a responsibility shared among national, regional and local government authorities, food legislation provides a mechanism to clearly define the role and responsibilities of each the national bodies and lays down procedures for cooperation and collaboration to ensure the consistent implementation of food safety controls.

Prof Reilly noted that in the modernization of food law is essential to formulating integrated food safety policies and systems that address potential risks across the entire food chain, from production to consumption. Enforcement actions should be based on an assessment of risk and that risk assessment should be based on the best scientific evidence available. In modernizing food laws and regulations, provisions should be included to require the food sector to design and implement food safety management based on the principles of the Hazards Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) system and to have recall and withdrawal mechanisms in place to track and trace unsafe products and to remove such products from the market quickly.

Prof Reilly concluded by saying that food legislation and the body of food law should reflect national food safety policy that seeks to protect consumers' health and interests and that facilitates trade in food. It is essential to ensure that enforcement of food legislation is based on the best scientific evidence and on the principles of risk analysis. In addition, regulations should be applied consistently and proportionally along the food chain and food laws should ensure cooperation and collaboration of all national agencies with responsibilities for enforcement.

As any food law must be supported by detailed regulations and standards, Dr Brent guided the meeting on the importance of establishing food regulations and standards in accordance with international guidance where nationally appropriate. The emphasis of his presentation was the need for such regulations and standards to be formulated within a risk analysis framework. He stated that the risk analysis process is a structured framework which allows regulators to identify, assess and manage food-related health risks.

Risk analysis can be used across a broad range of circumstances and can lead to effective management strategies even when the available data are limited. Its use encourages communication among all interested parties, including consumers. It also can identify areas in which more data are

required in order to refine the risk analysis. Dr Brent stated clearly that risk analysis frameworks are a structured way of examining and incorporating the wide variety of factors that impact on a decision-making process and are widely used in the health sector and that any strategy should strengthen such frameworks as an integral component of establishing regulations and standards.

Dr Yuk Yin Ho, Centre for Food Safety, Hong Kong (China), gave a presentation about risk communication in national food safety control programmes. He emphasized that risk communication is one of the three components of the risk analysis framework, which forms the foundation for food control policy and consumer protection measures. He advised that the goal of risk communication is to enhance proper risk perception in the community and stimulate behavioural change for prevention of foodborne illness. He said risk communication can be divided into three functional areas: food safety emergency communications, operation communications and behaviour change communications.

He further told temporary advisers that public trust and confidence are of utmost importance to effective risk communication and that, therefore, mechanisms of accountability, involvement and transparency should be established. He said candid, easily understood, complete and factually accurate information should be provided to the stakeholders in a timely manner and that comprehensive risk communication plans involving both internal and external partners facilitate regular information exchanges, understanding of public concerns and rapid response to food incidents. He proposed that the strategy should encourage food safety authorities to take strategic actions to enhance their risk communication capacities to overcome these barriers, including establishing a specialized risk communication unit, employing information technology to build infrastructure for communication and supporting food safety professionals in continually evolving risk communication.

Prof Reilly advised about the formulation and implementation of strategies to facilitate greater food business commitment to producing and processing safe food. He said that food production, processing and marketing systems have grown more complex in recent years as the length of the food chain has expanded globally, which pose major challenges for both the food industry and food regulatory sectors. Gaining commitment from the food sector for food safety involves a combination of voluntary and mandatory initiatives.

The most effective system of encouraging food businesses to focus on the highest standards of food safety and hygiene is to introduce legislative requirements that place the primary responsibility for producing and marketing safe food with the food sector. This can be supplemented by voluntary initiatives by the food sector such as the adoption of safety assurance codes of practice and initiatives to reduce the salt and saturated fat content of processed foods. Prof Reilly also noted that the traceability of food and food ingredients along the food chain is an essential element in ensuring food safety.

Each sector of the food chain should create and implement contingency plans that include full traceability, recall and withdrawal programmes and systems for notifying food control agencies in the event unsafe foods are placed on the market. Strategies to gain greater commitment from the food sectors for food safety that were discussed were the possibility of making public the results of inspections carried out by national food control agencies. Publication of inspection outcomes allows consumers to make informed choices about the places in which they dine out and from which they purchase food. Subjecting food businesses to financial penalties is also a method of improving the commitment to compliance with food regulations, especially where financial penalties are severe.

Prof Reilly concluded by stating that there are many stakeholders involved in ensuring the safety and quality of foods moving in both national and international trade. Responsibilities are shared by national governments, farmers, food processors and manufacturers, food retailers, caterers and consumers. A positive interaction is required among all of these players if the system is to be successful and

consumers are to be protected adequately. Food control agencies need to engage with food businesses and their associations or other representative organizations to increase business' commitment to safe and healthy food.

Dr Chen Junshi and Dr Ben Embarek, WHO Representative's Office for China provided a paper and presentation on the need to improve the availability of food safety data to better guide policy and risk analysis. Of particular note was the view that modern food safety systems, in order to be efficient, rely increasingly on the availability and use of data and information about what makes people ill (foodborne diseases), what is in the food (pathogens, toxins and harmful chemicals) and data on how systems perform throughout the food chain. The credibility of a national system is depending on the quality of these data and on the capabilities of those within this system to analyse and act upon these data.

Data in most countries often are imperfect and limited. Being able to make the most of limited data by performing trend analysis, modelling and forecasting has become equally important tools in reducing the current large burden of foodborne diseases and facilitating an increasingly global food trade. They noted that countries usually have very limited resources allocated to food control and food management activities. Therefore, being able to focus these resources on the main issues of concern is crucial.

Their paper also noted that food analysis capacity and the use of food safety data to drive policy varies significantly across the Pacific. They told the experts that in order to enable countries of the Region to be informed about foodborne diseases affecting their populations and the risks associated with them, it was necessary to understand from which foods these diseases are originating. Without such data, a national food safety system will operate in the dark, be highly inefficient and will waste the limited resources available for food safety.

Dr Embarek emphasized that where data was available it still was necessary to be better able to access, analyse and use it; that there was a need to address a lack of testing capacity in some countries and areas; and that there is a need to expand total diet studies and a need to identify priority foodborne diseases in the Region.

In addition, strategic activities that would enhance the gathering and application of food safety data in the Pacific include optimizing the mapping of food analysis capacity across the Pacific; upgrading food analysis capacity in the Pacific, including facilities, equipment and technical, financial and human resources as required to monitor local and imported food; expanding total diet study methodology to additional island countries and making use of experiences gained in Fiji; and supporting a Pacific-wide approach to conducting microbiological analyses of food in the Pacific as part of the risk assessment process to better inform risk management decisions.

Dr Tamano Matsui, WHO, reported on the APSED and the APSED 2010 with a focus on foodborne disease surveillance. She stated that foodborne disease cases or outbreaks may be detected by two kinds of public health surveillance systems requiring immediate action: event-based surveillance (EBS), accepting information from various sources (e.g. media, community, institutions and health care facilities), and the indicator-based surveillance (IBS) by case-based notification or sentinel site reporting, mainly from health care facilities and laboratories.

Both IBS and EBS also provide information about foodborne disease trends, and this information would be available to be used in food safety policy-making once foodborne diseases were addressed adequately by surveillance systems. The APSED 2010 outlines the need for EBS and IBS systems and risk management capacities. It also outlines the strategic approach for the establishment of such systems in Member States. Strengthening public health laboratories is also included in the APSED 2010, but

additional attention may need to be given to identify microbiological and chemical agents of foodborne disease and to food analysis.

Hazard gave a presentation on food safety education as a core component of a food control system and how to ensure such education is effective. He noted it was important to understand underlying social determinants and food-related behaviours and to target any education through HACCP-based studies of hazards and their control measures. Food safety education generally is of varying application and effectiveness across the Region. Some programmes exist for vulnerable populations in the higher-income countries and food control authorities in several of those countries employ a range of web-based strategies, food safety awareness weeks or months and the media.

By contrast, the lower-income countries are limited by resources and rely more on intensive campaigns of limited duration. Exclusive breastfeeding for infants at least until 6 months old is broadly promoted by health authorities in principle, but it is not widely implemented through hospitals, clinics or by doctors in a number of countries. Safe complementary feeding needs significantly greater commitment. WHO's five keys to safer food have been introduced to schools in a number of countries but not broadly incorporated into school curricula.

Hazard also noted the value of consumer representatives being committed to food safety education but recognized that there are no consumer representative organizations in many countries of the Western Pacific Region. He emphasized the importance of overcoming resource limitations through technical, creative and financial partnerships; of ensuring that trainers are trained in being effective communicators and educators; of ensuring that messages are focused and prioritized; and of ensuring that education efforts are optimally planned, implemented, monitored and adjusted as required. He then provided guidance on a possible strategic direction for food safety education, strategic actions and a means of monitoring achievements over the next five years.

Bishop asked the temporary advisers to recognize also the importance of inspection services in protecting public health and facilitating the trade of safe food. In particular, she noted that the current status of inspectors and inspection services is highly variable across the Region, with inadequate training not reflecting true needs being a frequent feature. She further noted that science, risk and outcome-based concepts are yet to be understood in most inspection services and that inspection services had inadequate resources, inadequate legal provisions, limited record management, the absence of a plan for frequency of inspections and the absence of standard operating procedures.

To address such concerns, Bishop stated that it was important to remember that the building of the capacity of food inspectors and the strengthening of inspection services will be facilitated through the sharing of expertise, resources and information regionally and subregionally. It also was important to ensure that inspections added value and were coordinated effectively. Bishop then proposed a number of strategic actions that could be considered if countries are to ensure that their inspection services are to be trusted and that they are effective public health protection services.

Mr Ym-Shik Lee, Technical Secretary, Korea Food and Drug Administration, the Republic of Korea, informed meeting participants that the Korea Food and Drug Administration (KFDA) had established the Korea Food Safety Information Center (KFSI) to enhance information flow in response to food safety incidents taking place within and outside Korea. The importance of the FAO/WHO and the International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN) as an international information-sharing group greatly was appreciated and the network should be strengthened. At the same time, there is a need for national governments to strengthen national information-sharing systems.

Dr Lee noted that since being established in July 2009, KFSI is making a great contribution to food safety in Korea by collecting, analysing and providing food safety information and supporting a food traceability system. In addition, KFSI tries to accomplish sharing of information with all stakeholders along the food chain. He also noted that KFSI collected and delivered 7413 pieces of daily global information to KFDA in 2009 and 12 957 pieces by the end of August 2010.

With his significant experience with information-sharing through KFSI, Dr Lee urged the experts to consider, when working out the WHO Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011-2015, the importance of:

- (1) improving both the quantity and quality level of food safety information;
- (2) computerizing the process of information exchange using cutting-edge information technology;
- (3) cooperation among agencies concerned in the Western Pacific Region;
- (4) ensuring adequate feedback mechanisms on information shared;
- (5) conducting a full assessment of information needs; and
- (6) the importance of linking national systems with INFOSAN.

Bishop informed the meeting of the critical public health and economic need for enhancing capacities to detect, assess and respond to food safety events. She stated that food safety emergency preparedness and response would be best facilitated through the sharing of expertise, resources and information regionally and subregionally. To achieve this, she proposed that mechanisms among agencies to share surveillance and other information and to undertake joint risk analysis should be established; agencies and partners identified also should be INFOSAN Focal Points in order to build national INFOSAN networks; and that national IHR Focal Points and the INFOSAN Emergency Contact Points should establish agreements on their roles and responsibilities.

Bishop told the meeting that food safety emergency response plans should be an integral part of a national food control system and that such plans should draw upon many subsystems within a national food control system. She proposed that countries and areas should use the FAO/WHO Guidelines on Food Safety Emergency Response Planning; undertake food safety emergency simulations to test the food safety emergency response plans and improve where necessary; and participate in regional and international food safety emergency simulations to test national-, regional- and international-level notification and response systems.

Bishop also noted the importance of risk analysis in such responses, including risk assessment, risk communication and risk management subsystems such as traceability and food recall. She also called on countries and areas to participate in INFOSAN through the timely communication of information relating to food safety events of international interest and the establishment of systems to ensure that the INFOSAN Emergency Contact Point is available 24 hours, seven days a week. She noted that partnerships with other information-sharing initiatives also were important.

Hazard then introduced the scheduled group work on the core areas for inclusion in the Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015 and the temporary advisers were divided into four groups to address different areas of the proposed strategy. After initial discussions that continued into the evening, the experts reported back to a plenary session on the third day to receive feedback from the broader group on the strategy's components being drafted. The plenary session also was used to include

indicators in the strategy so that countries and areas of the Region can better assess the effectiveness of the plan in 2015. The experts returned to their groups and revised the different core areas of action before again returning to a plenary to conduct a final review and discussion of the draft Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011-2015.

Session 4: Future strategic directions, approaches and the main components of the Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015

The meeting then concluded with Session 4 -- a discussion of the future strategic directions, approaches and main components of a Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015 and the next steps to getting it endorsed by Member States. Hazzard gave the closing remarks on behalf of Dr Shin and Dr Kasai and thanked the experts for providing the draft regional strategy for further consideration by Member States, to be considered at the WHO Western Pacific Regional Committee Meeting in 2011. The Chairperson, Dr Chen Junshi, noted the hard work of the experts, the representative and observer and the Secretariat and expressed satisfaction with the meeting having reached consensus on the conclusions, recommendations and draft regional strategy.

2.4.4 Conclusions and recommendations of the Expert Meeting on a Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015

The meeting concluded with consensus on the vision, goal, objectives and structure of a draft Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011-2015 and the experts agreed that there was a great need for such a strategy and that it was timely to present this new draft to the Member States at the 2011 Western Pacific Regional Coordinating Committee meeting. It also was recognized that it was important to conduct further consultation through both in-country visits and a technical consultation process to ensure the draft regional strategy was appropriate for all Member States.

The experts recommended that the draft Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015 should be advanced through consultation and be finalized and then be presented to the 2011 Western Pacific Regional Coordinating Committee for its consideration, amendment and endorsement.

LIST OF TEMPORARY ADVISERS, REPRESENTATIVES/OBSERVERS
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REGIONAL FOOD SAFETY STRATEGY 2011-2015

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4. TECHNICAL CONSULTATION ON A WESTERN PACIFIC REGIONAL FOOD SAFETY STRATEGY 2011-2015

4.1 Agenda of the technical consultation

The agenda of the technical consultation was approved by the temporary advisers. The agenda is detailed below:

- (1) Opening session
- (2) Session 1: Guidance on and advances in food safety, 2001–2010
- (3) Session 2: Introduction to the draft Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015 (Part 1)
- (4) Session 3: Introduction to the draft Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015 (Part 2)
- (5) Session 4: Coordination and collaboration
- (6) Session 5: Next steps for the Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011-2015
- (7) Closing remarks

4.2 Opening ceremony

Dr Corinne Capuano welcomed the temporary advisers and gave the opening remarks on behalf of the WHO Regional Director for the Western Pacific, Dr Shin Young-soo. In her opening address, Dr Capuano noted that the globalization of the world's food supply has created complex challenges for those managing food safety programmes. In recent years, several crises in the Western Pacific Region have generated media and consumer interest in food safety, including the first detection of Ebola Reston Virus in food animals and, most recently, the radioactive contamination of food in Japan.

Dr Capuano asked the temporary advisers to consider that the Western Pacific Region includes not only the world's most populous country but some of the least-populated small-island nations and that, regardless of size, all deserve due consideration in this strategy.

In concluding her remarks, Dr Capuano expressed her appreciation to all present for their commitment to supporting the advancement of the regional strategy and wished everyone a productive meeting and enjoyable stay in Malaysia.

4.3 Proceedings of the technical consultation

Session 1: Guidance on and advances in food safety 2001–2010

The first session of the consultation provided a foundation for future considerations. It achieved this by informing participants of global and regional guidance and by ensuring participants that they were aware of the current status of food safety programmes within the Region.

Prof Reilly initiated the consultation technical programme by giving an overview of food control management best practices. He noted that food control management required the balancing of many aspects, including public health, science, consumer confidence and trade as well as politics if it is successfully to protect consumers' health, their interests and to provide an underpinning framework for food trade. To achieve these three objectives, it is essential that controls are in place along the farm-to-fork continuum in food production. This concept has been identified in laws in many higher-income countries and regions. A second principle that should be adhered to is the commitment of government departments and businesses to implement food safety measures as a shared responsibility through genuine partnerships.

Within government departments, where multiple agencies are involved, there is a need for an effective mechanism for coordination. In addition, there is a need to separate those that are working on laws to promote a sector's development and those that are enforcing them. To achieve these principles in food control management, there is a requirement for a national food control plan as an open and transparent mechanism to garner the essential political and resourcing support. To underpin this, there should be a food law that identifies clearly the roles and responsibilities of each government department, clearly specifies industry's responsibility for food safety and provides the authority for secondary legislation.

Prof Reilly said any secondary legislation should be risk-based and that enforcement procedures should be guided according to risk. He also emphasized the value of gathering data in a coordinated manner to better use it for assessing risk. Another essential component of a food control system identified by Prof Reilly is food safety education and training along the food chain. Finally, he emphasized the importance of planning for the management of food incidents and the benefits of global and regional cooperation.

Dr Maged Younes, Director, Department of Food Safety and Zoonoses, WHO, stated that Article 2 of the WHO Constitution requires WHO to formulate, establish and promote international standards with respect to food, biological, pharmaceutical and similar products. Like Prof Reilly, Dr Younis reported that the article recognized that food safety required an international approach because unsafe food knows no frontiers, resources are limited and the distribution of unsafe food has trade implications.

Areas of focus at the global level include, but are not limited to, evidence-based scientific options for policy-making for consumer protection and food safety management; setting international standards and promoting their implementation; formulating mitigation strategies for food incidents; international coordination of food-related outbreak surveillance, detection and response; risk communication for prevention of foodborne and zoonotic diseases; coordinating management of health risks at the human-animal-ecosystem interface; and sustainable capacity-building.

Dr Younes then reported on the World Health Assembly Resolution WHA 53.15 that was endorsed in 2000. He also advised that, subsequently, that WHA resolution 55.16 resulted in the revision of the IHR (2005), the establishment of the International Food Safety Authorities Network in 2004 and the establishment of WHO's Foodborne Disease Burden Epidemiology Reference Group in 2006. He

reminded the temporary advisers of WHA Resolution 63.3, which was endorsed in 2010. That resolution urged Member States to further develop surveillance for foodborne disease and food contamination; risk assessment, risk management, including the HACCP system, and risk communication; food safety emergency response; product tracing and recall; and strengthening of laboratory capacity.

The resolution also called on Member States to participate fully in INFOSAN activities, including supporting the timely transmission of data, information and knowledge about food-safety emergencies through the network in a transparent manner; enhance the integration of food safety in food aid, food security and nutrition to reduce the occurrence of foodborne diseases and improve the health outcomes, particularly among vulnerable groups; and to continue to establish and maintain a sustainable systems approach to food safety encompassing the complete food production chain from farm to consumption, including education.

The resolution promoted dialogue and collaboration among human health, veterinary and food-related disciplines for foodborne risk reduction along the entire food production chain and urged active participation in the work of Codex. Dr Younes concluded with an overview of WHO activities in food safety and reiterated the importance of close collaboration with international partners, particularly the FAO and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), with Member States and national and regional agencies or groupings.

Bishop explained the composition and role of the Regional Committee for the Western Pacific (RCM) and recalled Resolution 52.R2 (2001), which spelt out the first regional strategy for food safety, and urged Member States to enhance food safety in 10 core areas of work, and Resolution 55.R6 (2004).

The latter urged Member States to give greater emphasis to food safety issues, allocate additional resources to making food safer and share information, including through the International Food Safety Authorities Network; to develop and maintain national surveillance of foodborne diseases, participate in regional surveillance mechanisms, monitor hazards in food and collaborate in the rapid analysis and sharing of surveillance data in order to reduce the risk of foodborne diseases; to establish policies and plans of action to encourage cooperation among stakeholders so that food safety is addressed throughout the food production, processing and marketing chain; to introduce evidence-based regulatory controls in markets where live birds and animals are sold for food in order to reduce the burden of emerging zoonoses and food-related diseases; and to participate in and strengthen multicountry approaches to improving food safety, such as those being pursued by the Codex Alimentarius and ASEAN.

The same resolution also asked the Regional Director to give greater emphasis to food safety and strive to obtain commitments from Member States, international organizations and the donor community to allocate additional resources to respond to the growing challenges of foodborne diseases and food contamination. In addition to such regional resolutions, Bishop also emphasized previous global guidance provided by the Beijing Declaration, which was signed by a number of countries in 2007. This presentation then was followed by a report by Hazzard on progress made in food safety within the countries and areas of the Western Pacific since the 2001 Regional Committee Resolution 52.R2. These advances are previously reported in Appendix 2.3 on the expert meeting.

The round-table discussion addressed the need for primary legislation to be very clear regarding both the coordinating role for food safety and the roles, responsibilities and scope of authority of each government department with some responsibility for controlling food safety. Prof Reilly illustrated how such a system should operate with reference to the system in place in Ireland. Dr Ben Embarek emphasized the importance of ensuring genuine, cooperative coordination. In the round-table discussion, Dr Minda Manantan, Deputy Executive Director, National Meat Inspection Service, the Philippines, commented on the important role of local government and Rose Kavanamur, Technical Advisor – Food

Safety and Quarantine, Ministry of Health, Papua New Guinea, emphasized the need for better international and regional coordination in addressing the issues discussed.

Session 2: Introduction to the draft Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015 (Part 1)

Bishop outlined the principles that a Regional Food Safety Strategy must consider, including that it should be driven by countries and areas; that it should be consistent with international resolutions and agreements; that it should be technically robust; that it should be achievable and measurable; and the technical consultation should be informed of the maximum benefit that can be derived if the draft vision broadens the normal expectation of food control systems so that they address both healthy and safe food.

She also reported on the proposed time limit goal and the two objectives to achieve it. In relation to the first objective, Bishop said the mechanisms to achieve this objective involved building and optimizing risk-based regulatory frameworks; improved availability of food safety data to better guide policy and risk analysis; strengthening the capacity of inspection services to enforce laws effectively; effective food safety training and education; and increasing the capacity to detect, assess and manage food safety incidents and emergencies. Bishop also outlined the process to move the draft food safety strategy forward and the feedback so far received through in-country consultation.

Gaylene Tasmania, Ministry of Agriculture, Niue, gave a presentation on improved food control by coordination throughout the food chain continuum and adequate funding. She defined food control, noted the importance of effective food control systems, highlighted the core components of such systems and emphasized that if food authorities were to obtain an increase in government commitment to food safety, the primary legislation had to be in place to ensure a coordinated approach and adequate funding. Tasmania then guided the consultation on key steps to start to obtain improved food control by coordination throughout the food chain continuum and adequate funding, proposed a strategic direction for the regional strategy and put forward strategic actions for consideration along with possible indicators against which progress could be measured.

Hae Jung Yoon, National Institute of Food and Drug Safety Evaluation, the Republic of Korea, gave guidance on risk-based regulatory frameworks. She stated that the establishment of effective food standards enforcement is critical to achieving expected outcomes. Codex standards are being worked out on such a framework by specialists in expert meetings and ad hoc expert consultations with scrutiny by Member States through various Codex committees.

Hae Jung Yoon also noted the multisectoral challenge of addressing food safety along the food chain continuum and the challenge of obtaining the commitment of food businesses to a risk-based approach to food safety. She reported on the findings of the previous expert regarding proposed strategic direction, strategic actions at national and international levels and the proposed indicators for Theme 2 in the draft Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011-2015, including having risk communication mechanisms in place for the interactive exchange of information among stakeholders in Member States of the Western Pacific Region.

Dr Chen Junshi emphasized the types of data needed (e.g. foodborne disease, food contamination (pathogens, toxins and harmful chemicals)) and data on the performance of controls throughout the food chain. He also discussed the sources of data, the quality of data and its adequacy. He briefed the group on the proposed strategic direction that includes introducing a systematic effort to collect, analyse and interpret data on food contaminants and food consumption and establishing effective linkages with the public health system to improve the availability of attributable data on foodborne disease. He further outlined proposed strategic actions to achieve this direction and proposed indicators.

Dr Chen Junshi then gave Chinese examples related to data collection and use in food safety control in China. He noted that the Food Safety Law of the People's Republic of China, 2009, identified that a surveillance system for food safety shall be established nationwide for surveillance over foodborne disease, food contamination and other food-related hazards to human health. He said the national food safety surveillance systems in China include a foodborne illness surveillance network; a food contamination monitoring network (which addressed heavy metals, pesticide residues, veterinary drug residues, mycotoxins and food additives, even though the latter are not contaminants); a total diet studies programme; and targeted surveillance programmes. He used the examples from China to demonstrate that regular and targeted national surveillance networks are useful in providing necessary data for decision-making in food safety control.

Hazzard then introduced the group work and the consultation split into three groups to discuss and enhance the first three themes of the draft regional strategy that had been outlined by the previous three speakers. The groups then reported back to plenary and all of the participants in the technical consultation helped further refine the draft strategy. Of particular significance was the consensus of the meeting to emphasize the importance of food safety in food security, as outlined in Theme 2.

Session 3: Introduction to the draft Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015 (Part 2)

Jope Tamani, Ministry of Health, Fiji, discussed the importance of inspection services to effective food control systems. He informed the consultation that proper training of food inspectors is a prerequisite for an efficient food control system, noting, "A food control system will be only be as good as the implementers". The greatest needs are to ensure that the inspection services are appropriately trained and equipped and have personnel committed to partnerships to ensure food safety.

He advised the consultation that the draft strategy identifies the need to work at a regional level for the identification of core competencies for food inspections, reflecting inspections throughout the food chain (including imported foods) and for specific nonroutine activities (e.g. foodborne diseases, food recalls and mass gatherings). He then discussed the national activities needed to be applied to ensure that effective risk-based food inspection is in place in Member States of the Western Pacific Region. To illustrate the issue with a national example, he gave an insight into developments in Fiji. Tamani then advised the consultation on what was in the draft strategy for this area of work, including the strategic directions, actions and indicators.

Dr Yuk Yin Ho, Hong Kong (China), gave a presentation about food safety education and training. He started by discussing the new tools associated with the Internet that are available to many countries and areas. He also noted that community awareness campaigns are useful in increasing consumer attention to food safety, including campaigns through existing community mechanisms and the use of the media. Awareness-raising is not the end of education and training programmes. Of importance is education and training to impact on food handling behaviours. To optimally achieve such behaviour change, there is a need to better understand the underlying social determinants and food-related behaviours; to clearly identify potential hazards and their control measures; and to establish programmes optimally targeted at, and constructed for, particular audiences.

Dr Yuk Yin Ho also then identified the need to focus on specific at-risk population groups and food businesses employed in the handling of high-risk foods. To help progress towards United Nation's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) 4 and 5, the education priority should be pregnant women or those caring for infants and for the elderly and chronically ill. Food safety should be a key element in school curricula in order to increase safe food handling among children. He illustrated efforts being undertaken in each of these areas worldwide and emphasized that it was important for each country and area to learn from successful approaches.

He also emphasized the importance of ensuring that trainers and educators are competent and capable. He reviewed the strategic direction outlined in the draft regional strategy and introduced each of the strategic actions proposed in it. Dr Yuk Yin Ho also specified that there were two area indicators proposed for this core area for action: food safety training programmes to be set up to be targeted and effective and to reach the poor and vulnerable population with partnerships to enhance training outcomes and food safety training for food handlers engaged in handling high-risk food that shall be required by legislation and an implementation process put in place.

Sally Johnston, Manager, Compliance Audit, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, New Zealand, discussed the need to enhance the ability of food control systems to detect, assess and manage food safety incidents and emergencies. She reported that the proposed strategic direction specified in the draft regional strategy identifies the need to “Contribute to health security by enhancing capacities to detect, assess and manage food safety incidents and emergencies at national and international levels. This will be achieved through sharing expertise in relevant areas, resources, and information regionally and sub-regionally”.

Johnston then identified the proposed strategic actions to move forward toward the strategic direction. In illustrating the importance of being prepared, she reviewed the response to the Christchurch earthquakes of 4 September 2010 and 22 February 2011. She noted that the New Zealand Food Safety Authority Incident Response protocol was activated on 6 September 2010 and that risk assessment and communication and risk management activities were applied in this initial phase, including “boil water” notices and water sampling and testing.

A second phase of risk analysis was implemented starting 27 February, including an assessment of all open food businesses; supporting businesses wanting to implement appropriate management practices; managing those businesses reluctant to take appropriate actions; and identifying and overcoming language barriers. She also gave feedback on lessons learnt from the New Zealand experience and emphasized the importance of having in place Food Safety Emergency Response Plans that have been tested and updated as needed.

Hazzard again introduced the group work and the consultation split into a new set of groups to discuss and enhance Themes 4-6 of the draft regional strategy that had been outlined by the previous three speakers. The groups again reported back to the plenary and all of the participants in the technical consultation helped further refine the draft strategy.

Session 4: Coordination and collaboration

Dr Harpal Singh, WHO Representative’s Office for Malaysia reported that the APSED is a biregional strategy to provide a common framework for countries to strengthen their capacity to manage emerging disease threats. It was established in 2005 and updated in 2010 to reflect the expanded scope of the revised IHR (2005). He noted that APSED 2010 was set up to guide national and regional preparedness efforts for future threats and reported that it was endorsed by the RCM in October 2010. He explained the goal and objectives of APSED 2010 and discussed the expanded scope. He then emphasized the surveillance, risk assessment and response focus area while also addressing focus areas on laboratories, risk communication, preparedness and response and the regional aspects of preparedness and response. Dr Singh referred to APSED 2010 as a road map for Member States in the Asia Pacific Region to build up the IHR (2005) core capacity requirements.

Prof Reilly discussed the importance of sharing information through INFOSAN in a global market. He reminded participants of the origins of the network, what it is and its purpose. He challenged the

temporary advisers to consider why there was a need to share information and illustrated the globalization of food production and food chains as an obvious answer to the question posed.

Dr Brent reported via teleconference that the driving force for setting up the food safety cooperation forum was the concept of mapping what were the priority needs within APEC for establishing or strengthening food control systems in APEC economies. The forum was established in 2007 with 21 economies participating. One of the main aims is to progress toward harmonizing standards with the goal of facilitating trade in safe food. Other goals were to establish transparent information-sharing and communication networks and enhance skills and human resource capacities.

The forum is under the Subcommittee for Standards and Conformance, which reports to the APEC Committee for Trade and Investment, which in turn reports to APEC senior officials, trade ministers and leaders. Dr Brent further reported that the second meeting of the forum was held in 2009 in Singapore, where the successes of the forum were enunciated, including an increased profile for food safety in APEC economies; that capacity-building has reached 550 participants from 19 economies; and the establishment of the Partnership Training Institute Network (PTIN) that has received the involvement and support of major industry associations and that has initiated building training modules (e.g. supply chain management; food incident response; risk analysis; and laboratory-capacity and testing). Continuing challenges were noted, including the need to improve communication; moving to align standards; enhanced coordination of capacity-building activities; and the need to provide objective feedback on progress.

Noraini Dato' Mohd Othman gave a presentation on ASEAN's food safety goals, structure and activities, the outcomes achieved and future directions and the possible areas of synergy on food safety among ASEAN, WHA Resolution 63.3 and a Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy. She noted that the ASEAN bodies that undertake substantive work on food safety are ASEAN Expert Group on Food Safety (AEGFS); ASEAN Task Force on Codex (ATFC); ASEAN Food Safety Network (AFSN); and ASEAN Consultative Committee on Standards and Quality Prepared Foodstuff Product Working Group (ACCSQ PFPWG).

The AEGFS is a forum to address food safety issues of importance in ASEAN, including capacity-building to strengthen food safety programmes. Through the ASEAN Food Safety Improvement Plan (AFSIP), which comprises the ASEAN Food Safety Policy and Plan of Action, AEGFS strives to coordinate the work of food safety in ASEAN to avoid duplication and overlapping. The ATFC provides a forum where ASEAN common positions on Codex are formulated and promotes the harmonization of national regulatory standards with Codex. The AFSN coordinates information-sharing on food safety in ASEAN. The ACCSQ PFPWG addresses the elimination of technical barriers to trade by exchanging information about ASEAN Member States' mandatory requirements; identifying areas for possible harmonization and MRAs; and identifying technical infrastructure for testing and conformity assessment.

Noraini Dato' Mohd Othman said it would be beneficial for ASEAN to strengthen collaborative efforts with WHO and other partners in food safety and to reduce the occurrence of foodborne illnesses.

Mapolu reported, as she did at the previous expert meeting, that at the 39th Pacific Islands Forum meeting in Niue in August 2008, the leaders acknowledged the major importance of food security as an emerging issue which poses challenges for the future well-being of people across the Region and committed their governments to take immediate action. Mapolu also reported that a Food Secure Pacific Framework for Action was adopted by high-level officials from the Pacific at a Pacific Food Summit conducted in Port Vila, Vanuatu, in April 2010 and that this Framework for Action along with the Pacific Regional Trade Facilitation Programme and Pacific trade agreements were important drivers for

strengthening food safety control in the Pacific. She noted the need to ensure consistency between the proposed regional strategy and the Food Secure Pacific Framework for Action.

Bishop gave a final presentation on the seventh theme of the draft regional strategy. She confirmed the need to minimize differences in regulatory frameworks. Bishop also highlighted the need to optimize the sharing of food safety information; implement effective cooperation between lower- and higher-income countries as well as among lower-income countries; and to facilitate effective collaboration between agencies working to assist national governments to make the best use of resources.

Bishop then advised the meeting of the proposed strategic direction of Theme 7 and suggested strategic actions, including establishing a food safety cooperation working group among key representatives of ASEAN, the Pacific, APEC and other international and regional organizations. Through such a group, a number of actions could be worked on to enhance coordination and cooperation. Bishop also emphasized the importance of strengthening food safety capacities through information- and experience-sharing, including information about new technologies and innovative systems established to assist in food control. Participants also were asked to consider the importance of establishing effective partnerships between lower- and higher-income countries as well as among lower-income countries. Bishop concluded by outlining proposed indicators for consideration of the participants in the technical consultation.

Following the presentation by Bishop, the Chairperson facilitated a round-table discussion about what are common areas of work, what areas may not be considered adequately and how partners can better support each other. With this in mind, the participants in the technical consultation made suggestions to enhance Theme 7 of the draft strategy to ensure that it achieved its expressed purpose. The outcomes of the discussion are in the version of Theme 7 presented in the strategy. In addition, it was noted that the restructuring of ASEAN is being initiated with the aim of working towards an ASEAN-free trade agreement. It also was noted that the Rapid Alert System for ASEAN was also in its infancy, with several countries actively participating.

4.5: Conclusions and recommendations of the technical consultation

The technical consultation finalized a Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011-2015 for consideration at the Regional Committee Meeting. The structure of the strategy was agreed and it was proposed that it be shared with partner organizations for possible minor modification; that it should have final editorial adjustments; and then it should be presented to the 2011 Western Pacific Regional Coordinating Committee for its consideration, amendment and endorsement.

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