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The Use of HACCP in a Risk-Based Food Safety Management System – the Australian experience Abstract by Peter May

In 1995 Australia experienced an outbreak of enterohaemorrhagic *E. coli* O111 in Garibaldi brand Mettwurst that resulted in the death of a five year old girl and 22 other cases of haemolytic uraemic syndrome in children many of which have resulted in permanent kidney dysfunction. As a result, the development of national food safety standards became a national priority.

Australia moved to a preventative approach in food safety risk management. Three standards for food businesses were central to this approach: Standard 3.2.1 *Food Safety programs*, Standard 3.2.2 *Food Safety Practices and General Requirements*, Standard 3.2.3 *Food Premises and Equipment*. While the implementation of HACCP based food safety programs was intended to be broadly applied to food businesses, the costs and practicality for industry and enforcement agencies required that a policy framework was needed to support their application.

In 2003, the *Ministerial Policy Guidelines on Food Safety Management: Food Safety Programs* identified four high risk areas for the mandatory introduction of the food safety standard: food service to vulnerable populations; raw ready-to-eat seafood (oysters and other bivalve molluscs); producers of manufactured and fermented meat, and catering operations. In this way, HACCP was used as a risk based tool in food safety management.

However, even for higher risk sectors it became apparent that the requirement for a food safety program was overkill, particularly for small businesses. The food safety program requirement for the catering sector, in particular, has been put on hold while other risk management tools, both regulatory and non-regulatory measures such as guidance materials, are examined.

The current approach is to classify food business sectors so that risk management regimes assigned are proportional to the risk and take into account the nature and capacity of the business. In this way a more tailored approach is provided where HACCP has become an important tool for decision making.