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# **Who regulates food? Australians' perceptions of responsibility for food safety**

## **Background**

Food scares have diminished trust in public institutions to guarantee food safety. Food governance in the post food scare era is concerned with institutional independence and transparency leading to a hybrid of public and private sector management and to mechanisms for consumer involvement in food governance. This paper explores Australian consumer's perceptions of who is, and should be responsible for food safety.

## **Methods**

Forty-seven participants were interviewed as part of a larger study on trust in the food system.

## **Results**

Participants associate food governance with government, industry, and the individual. While few participants can name the national food regulator, there is a strong belief that the government is responsible for regulating the quality and safety of food. Participants are wary of the role of the food industry in food safety, believing that profit motives will undermine effective food regulation. Personal responsibility for food safety practices was also identified.

## **Discussion**

While there are fewer mechanisms for consumer involvement and transparency built into the food governance system, Australian consumers display considerable trust in government to protect food safety. There is little evidence of the politicisation of food, reflecting a level of trust in the Australian food governance system that may arise from a lack of exposure to major food scares.

## **Who regulates food? Australians' perceptions of responsibility for food safety**

It has been said that anyone who is fond of sausages and legislation should not watch either being made (Beers 1996). Not surprisingly, perhaps, the regulation of food has received criticism rising by degrees to moral outrage. As food scares have been followed by food scandals - such as bovine spongiform encephalopathy, salmonella, and foot and mouth disease - public trust in food governance has been undermined in some countries (Kjaernes et al 2007; Scott et al 2004; Wales et al 2006; Berg et al 2005; Berg 2004).

While Australia has not experienced food scares of the same magnitude, there is some evidence of diminishing trust in the food supply with 45% of respondents aged 18 years and over more concerned about food safety and quality than five years ago (Williams et al 2004). Unlike Europe, the food fears most often documented in Australia are those surrounding the use of pesticides, food additives and preservatives (Williams et al 2004; FSANZ 2008), with younger people displaying little interest in, or reflection upon, the safety of the food supply (Holmberg et al 2010). While little research has specifically explored trust in food actors and institutions in Australia, data suggests moderate levels of trust in the food regulator, Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) and a strong expectation of the role of government in managing food safety (FSANZ 2008)

This paper explores the perceptions of forty-seven participants interviewed as part of a larger study on trust in food, of who is and who should be responsible for food safety in Australia. This data is explored in relation to an emerging trend in both Europe and Australia in which food governance is underpinned by neoliberal ideals of the primacy of the market and market mechanisms, the privatisation of food

regulatory functions, and increasing emphasis upon the rights and responsibilities of citizens (Brown & Gertz 2008; Halkier & Holm 2006). These ideals in turn, place greater responsibility for food safety upon food producers, the food industry and upon consumers (Halkier & Holm 2006; Tanaka 2005; Bergeaud-Blacker & Ferrenti, 2006).

Scholarly research on trust is often presented in academic articles without any formal definition, assuming that readers all share a common understanding (Ward & Meyer, 2009). However, given the vast range of definitions that have been used within literature on the sociology and psychology of trust, the possibility of a shared understanding remains problematic. Therefore, within this study we used an initial definition by Sabel (1993: 1133) whereby “the mutual confidence that no party will exploit another’s vulnerability”.. However, since this definition implies that trust is merely a product or process of inter-personal relationships between individuals, we also qualify the definition by reference to the idea that to trust others, is to “accept the risks associated with the type and depth of the interdependence inherent in a given relationship” (Shepard & Sherman, 1998). By a ‘relationship’, we do not limit trust to being an inter-personal or intersubjective outcome. Rather, we view relationships as ‘systems of communication’ (Luhmann, 1995) between individuals and social systems, and therefore trust is the process and outcome of relationships between individuals-individuals, individuals-social systems, and social systems-social systems.

### *Emerging trends in food governance*

Until the mid 1980s food governance in Europe occurred in a piecemeal fashion in line with national traditions and interests (Bergeaud-Blacker and Ferretti 2006). While customs duties had been removed between Member States of the European Union in 1957 food products were subject to different rules and regulations in different

countries. From the mid 1980s the European Union's *Principle of Mutual Recognition* enabled the marketing of food products that transgressed national food legislation between Member States unless they posed a threat to public health. This promoted greater conformity in food regulation effectively removing trade barriers between Member States.

Further changes to European food regulatory practices in response to food scares which have undermined trust in existing governance mechanisms occurred in 1990s (Scott et al 2004; Wales et al 2006; Halkier & Holm 2006; Sassatelli & Scott 2001; Halkier et al 2007). The focus of the European Union shifted at this time, from economic efficiencies to consumer protection and risk analysis of food production from farm-gate to table (Halkier & Holm 2006; Bergeaud-Blacker & Ferrenti, 2006). Guthman (2008: 1173) associates this shift with a movement from a "roll-back" neoliberalisation which reduced state regulation towards a "roll-out" neoliberalisation marked by "public-private institutional" governance. Roll-out neoliberalism is associated with models of food regulation based upon institutional independence, transparency, diversity and competitiveness (Halkier & Holm 2006; Tanaka 2005; Sassatelli & Scott 2001). Concerns with transparency contributed to a shift in the public/private divide as the privatisation of public resources and impact of free trade agreements on national food regulatory programs diminished the role for the nation state in food regulation (Halkier & Holm 2006; Guthman 2008). What has emerged is a hybrid of public and private sector management of food governance (Halkier & Holm 2006; Guthman 2008). Diminishing trust in food governance resulted in the establishment of European Food Safety Authority in 2002, an independent agency funded by the European community whose remit was to give scientific advice on food safety and nutrition questions (Bergeaud-Blacker & Ferrenti, 2006). The development

of the European Food Safety Authority occurred alongside of increasing self-regulation of food safety by the food industry and the development of voluntary codes of practice (Bergeaud-Blacker & Ferrenti, 2006).

Another response has been the development of mechanisms to increase the role for the consumer in food governance (Halkier & Holm 2006; Bergeaud-Blacker & Ferrenti, 2006; Shaw 2002). Food governance increasingly relies upon consumer sovereignty evident in the “centrality of informed consumer choice” (Sassatelli & Scott 2001: 222). The solution to food safety issues is found in ““responsible” consumers, who are competent, sovereign and individually able to protect themselves” through their routines and choices (Halkier & Holm 2006: 131) leading to greater personal responsibility for food safety. Halkier et al. (2007: 381) argue that this is typified by a form of “political consumerism” which is characterised by mechanisms for consumer engagement with the food regulation system through community consultation and by informed consumption.

The effect of food scares upon trust in public institutions has been felt keenly in the UK where it has contributed to greater involvement of the food industry in managing food safety (Bergeaud-Blacker & Ferrenti, 2006). The UK has now adopted food governance strategies which rely on partnership between government and industry. Food safety has become the responsibility of the Food Standards Agency (FSA), a semi-governmental body with a degree of independence with the goal of protecting public health and restoring confidence in food while supermarkets have been given greater responsibility for the development and maintenance of standards (Wales et al 2006; Shaw 2002). Greater supermarket responsibility for food standards has resulted in the BRC Global Standards which establish norms for food safety and quality control for supermarkets (Havinga 2006) while consumer involvement is encouraged

through the establishment of a Consumer Committee as part of the FSA (Halkier et al 2007).

Food regulation in Australia in contrast, continues to be fragmented, occurring over multiple levels of governance (Healy et al 2003). The responsibilities of the Federal government include the establishment of standards; importation restrictions and quarantine; and food labelling. State and Territory governments establish food legislation and implement and enforce standards while food inspection is managed by local councils (Healy et al 2003; Hobbs et al 2002; Sacks et al 2008). The establishment of food standards is the responsibility of Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ), a bi-national semi-governmental regulatory agency which was established in December 2002 (Winger 2003). In contrast to Europe, reform of the food regulatory system was driven by external factors including a need reduce the regulatory burden on the food industry (Blair, 1998) and to remain competitive in the export market (Hobbs et al 2002). Healy et al. (2003) argue that FSANZ was established in response to poor compliance with World Trade Organization treaties governing food safety and free trade<sup>i</sup> which require that Australia ensure protection of public health without restricting trade (Martin et al 2003). As such, FSANZ adopted a preventative approach to food safety reflected in legislation which defined what should be achieved rather than how it should be achieved (Martin et al 2003). This approach is evident in a movement from standards for specific foods to more general standards applying across food groups. Gruber et al. (2003: 368) view this approach as an attempt to encourage innovation through reducing “the regulatory burden on the food industry.” A preventative approach to food safety is also reflected in a move towards co-regulation of food production methods through greater self-regulation of food hygiene by the food manufacturing industry (Hobbs et al 2002; Winger 2003).

The establishment of FSANZ also coincided with more comprehensive food labelling requirements in response to consumer demands for more information to enable informed food choices (Winger 2003). There is however, less evidence of direct mechanisms for consumer involvement in food governance than in the UK. While the *Principles and Protocols for the Development of Food Regulation Policy Guidelines* endorsed in 2008, make provision for stakeholder and consumer consultations, formal consultation mechanisms are not built into the food governance system. The Australian food governance systems appear to be less streamlined than other jurisdictions with possible problems in consumer understanding and interaction with relevant bodies and stakeholders. Whether Australian consumers do understand the food system, - who governs and who is responsible for food regulation - is the focus of research reported here.

## **Methods**

Data for this study were collected through 44 semi-structured interviews with 47 participants.<sup>ii</sup> Participants were aged between 18 and 65 years and chosen on the basis of being the primary shopper for the household as earlier research suggests that these people are more likely to consider the safety and quality of their food (Coveney 2006). The study used purposive sampling techniques to attract participants who are information rich (Patton 2002). Popay et al (1998: 346) argue that one of the markers of quality in qualitative research is sampling via relevance; that is choosing a sample which produces “the type of knowledge needed to understand the structures and processes within which the individuals or situation are located”. The sample for this study was stratified by location, age and gender. Participants were sought from three locations: from the high socioeconomic status (SES) eastern suburbs (n=17) and low

SES southern suburbs of Adelaide (n=16) with a third group of participants drawn from rural South Australia (n=14) as existing research (Lupton 2003; Shilling 2002; Ward 2006; Ward & Coates 2006) suggests that reflexivity is stratified by class. As Shilling (2002: 634), states “different patterns of socialization result in class-based orientations towards symbolic knowledge which affect the degree to which the social world is seen as open to individual intervention.” Rural participants were sought as their access to food outlets is more limited. Four rural participants were recruited from areas surrounding Adelaide and ten from the mid North of South Australia, a region approximately 230 kms north of Adelaide.

The sample was also structured by age as both Lupton (2005) and Green et al (2003) found that younger participants were less concerned than older participants with food issues and were more likely to take risks in terms of food choice and health. The participants for this study were spread evenly across the age range, with the largest group aged 40-49 years (n=13) and smallest groups aged 30-39 (n=8). As degree of trust in food has also found to be related to gender (Green et al, 2003; Lupton 2005) both female and male participants were sought, however the requirement that participants be the primary shopper resulted in the recruitment of more females than males (13 males and 34 females). Ethics approval for this project was gained through the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Ethics Committee (SBREC4185).

Participants were primarily recruited via a random sample that was drawn from the electronic white pages (an electronic record of listed phone numbers). As participation was voluntary, the sample used was a convenience sample (Neuman 1997). Drawing names from the electronic white pages failed to elicit younger participants who often use cell phones rather than maintain a home phone service. Younger participants were recruited through flyers on campus at Flinders University in the first instance with

additional participants gained through snowballing. Participants from farming families were also actively recruited through snowballing as earlier interviews indicated that farmers held different views on food regulation to other participants.

The interviews were of approximately one hour duration and addressed issues of food choice; information about food; food safety; governance of food; trust in institutions and level of trust in food. The data for this paper is primarily drawn from discussion of food safety and the governance of food. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim.

Data were analysed using techniques from grounded theory, which seeks to provide a depiction of reality through allowing the theory to emerge from the data (Straus & Corbin 1998). The data were initially coded using open codes. Open coding is the stage of analysis that relates specifically to the naming, labelling and coding of phenomena through close examination of the data. In this way, the transcripts are read, and re-read, and each discrete incident, idea or concept is labelled. Similar incidents or ideas are given the same label, thereby allowing comparison both within and between transcripts (Strauss & Corbin 2004). The next stage is axial coding which makes links between the concepts (Strauss & Corbin 1998) In this stage conceptual labels are grouped under common themes (called categorisation) – this makes the data analysis more manageable. It is then more feasible to compare categories within and between transcripts, allowing us to look for similarities and differences (Strauss & Corbin 2004).

## **Results**

Data analysis elicited three themes in relation to who is responsible for governance of food pertaining to the role of government; role of industry and personal responsibility for management of food risks.

### *Role of government*

In general, the participants had given little thought to food regulation. This perspective is exemplified by one young man who states that “I haven’t even thought who is in charge of making sure that food is safe or who actually polices it”(L1). For some, this arises from the assumption that the safety of the food supply can be taken for granted. One young woman states for example, “my experience and perhaps the experience from many others [is] that you are not really too concerned about regulation and certain standards” (L2), leading participants to assume that when needed the resources will be available. As one participant puts it:

I’m aware that there’s someone out there doing the job but no I couldn’t tell you what the name or who the name of them was or who I’d have to contact, I’d have to jump on the computer and find them (J3).

The majority of participants in this study believe however, that food regulation is a governmental responsibility. One younger woman from rural South Australia exemplifies this belief stating: “[y]ou’d think it’s some government department but I do not know. That’s so hidden. I suppose it’s not hidden but it just happens, your food ends up on the shelves” (J34). Responsibility for food safety is most commonly attributed to a Health Department with little recognition of the responsibilities of different levels of government. One woman from the eastern suburbs states that “I’d like to think it’s a Federal thing and the Health Department, but I wouldn’t know exactly” (J27). Others cite the role of regulatory bodies. Another woman from the eastern suburbs notes “I imagine there is a regulatory board somewhere there

overseeing the whole lot” (J20). A number of participants had some awareness of FSANZ. A younger woman states: “I don’t know the name like clearly, there is a body that is responsible for food regulation standards but I do not know what they’re called” (L8). Only one participant could name FSANZ and describe their role.

I know there’s a regulatory body for both Australia and New Zealand and they have certain control over the food standards and also the standard of food as I said before we have the standard of food of what pesticides and things like that you can put on things and so they you know put in, have been put into that (J9).

Despite lack of specific knowledge there is general agreement that the responsibilities of government in relation to food regulation are the establishment and policing of food standards, quarantine and food inspection. This view is exemplified by one woman who when asked what she perceived the government’s role to be stated:

I would assume that they are meant to be regulating and checking on what foods are on the shelves and the label and that they’d be sending out health inspectors to different places to make sure it’s safe to eat and health and that. That’s what I’d assume (J13).

The government is generally viewed as doing this well. A woman from the eastern suburbs states that “I know that Australia has reasonable high hygiene standards and standards in general manufacturing and processing of food” (J18). Despite a high level of confidence in standards and legislation there is some reservation about the policing of standards related both to resourcing of food safety but also to flexibility of the standards. One woman notes that “they can always put the guidelines down but they’re only going to work if you’ve got somebody who follows them up to make sure that they happen” (J27) while another states that:

The legislation is good. It’s the implementation that it falls down in because of the lack of resources put into it. You know, it’s all very well you can write a piece of legislation but if you don’t have the backup to it, it’s not going to work as well as it should. (J9)

### *Role of industry*

Participant's perception of the role of industry in food regulation is less clear cut. There is a perception that both food manufacturers and food outlets have a responsibility to meet external standards.

I would also assume that they are governed by some other regulations or standard imposed by the national body, they have to obviously comply with the local level, but also meet the requirements (L2).

There are also strong consumer expectations that food outlets will be clean and that proper manual handling procedures will be observed. A woman from the Eastern suburbs states "[t]he main thing that I don't like is when you go to buy a sandwich or something and they've got rubber gloves on but then they handle the money with the gloves straight afterwards (J22). Food outlets are viewed as having a responsibility to train staff in safe food handling practices. A male participant with a history of management of supermarkets when discussing his last employer says:

The management would have to do food hygiene, food handling, all your department managers, fresh food people, we'd send them all off to training courses to get a food hygiene certificate so yeah it was pretty strict (J15).

Participants also cite the role of supermarkets in ensuring food is stored at the right temperature and is not out of date. Many noted that supermarkets circulate stock and sell food that is close to 'use by' dates at reduced prices.

Participants display greater reluctance to accept industry self-regulation of food safety standards by both food producers and retailers. Few when questioned about the privatisation of food regulatory functions believe that regulatory functions should be in industry hands. Many question the profit motives of private industry. A woman from rural South Australia says "...if you privatise a lot of things then it becomes just for money gain for shareholders and that of the companies and I don't know whether

that would be a benefit” (J44). Others raise issues around the accountability of food producers in comparison to government.

Just that being a private company doing it and whether short cuts are taken, that sort of thing, I don’t know. With the way some other things have been privatised I just, yeah, I don’t know, the buck stops with the government (J3).

One participant also highlights the difficulties in moving from standards to the non-enforceable codes of practice that underpin private management of food safety. She says:

...if you’re going to have regulations with bite, it’s no use having codes of practice. You have to have something that you can enforce, and codes of practices, - lovely things on paper! There’s always somebody who won’t go with the code of practice (J9).

Despite a growing emphasis upon food production from the farm-gate to table, the role of primary producers is largely ignored by participants in this study with only one participant citing the role of “farmers themselves...it’s partly their responsibility to ensure the quality of the food” (L5). This may reflect a high level of trust in Australian farming practices. A woman from the Eastern suburbs notes for example, that:

We’re very lucky in this country because ...we’re told that our farmers are the best in the world and you know, they probably are...they’re very efficient, they’re very clean. It’s constantly reinforced with us all that we grow clean food (J24).

### *Role of the individual*

A final theme relates to personal responsibility for food safety. There is little evidence of “political consumerism” in the form of consultation or dialogue around food regulation with only two participants involved in consumer groups concerned with food issues, one with a group concerned with animal welfare and the other with biological framing techniques (Halkier et al 2007). There is evidence however, of

active and informed individualised consumption with participants seeking information about food from both formal and informal networks. One participant describes getting information from “health magazines which is where we got our information on canola” (J17) and another through “the website and...lots of emails that I receive about any things like that” (J22).

Participants also demonstrate active consumption through personal food safety practices, viewing themselves as an integral part of food safety chain. One woman from the eastern suburbs exemplifies this belief, arguing that:

You’ve got to take responsibility in the end for what you put in your mouth so if you know, if you’re prepared to trust the government then that’s fine but I think you can’t always then turn around and say, but you said this was safe and if you didn’t actually wash it before you cooked it or you left it sitting on the bench and then it went off and then you, you know froze it and then you reheated it and you know, there comes a point where you’ve got to do it yourself. (J24)

Personal responsibility for food safety centres on strategies for food purchasing, storage and preparation. To ensure the food they are purchasing is safe to eat participants use ‘use by’ and ‘best by’ dates; visual cues; and the smell and feel of fresh produce. They also discriminate about where they purchase food with many stating they would not purchase food “anywhere that looks as though it’s not been cleaned” (J9). Participants also place trust in food outlets that they have established relationship with. One woman says “I guess the guy, like at [suburb], I know he gets his fish in – you know, fresh”. (J29)

Storage strategies centre on appropriate refrigeration of purchased and prepared food. A woman from the eastern suburbs notes that “you can get a nice piece of meat home ...if you don’t store it or you don’t cook it through well then you could have

problems” (J21). Food preparation strategies include care about the products used; cleanliness; and use of separate cutting boards and knives for meat, chicken and vegetables. This is viewed as an effective means of preventing food poisoning leading one woman to say:

I sort of in my own self try to avoid those situations full stop anyway and when in doubt chuck it out, you know. So I feel confident in the food choices that I make but also in my preparation choices and like I said when in doubt chuck it out (J10).

## **Discussion**

This research demonstrates that the perceptions of Australian consumers about who regulates food can be separated into distinct categories: government, industry, and the individual or personal responsibility. These themes reproduce ideas about food governance associated with neoliberalism evident in an increasing role for industry through of privatisation of regulatory functions and increasing consumer involvement in, and personal responsibility for management of food risks.

Participants in this study, primarily associate food governance with government, most commonly with health departments and the Federal government. While few participants could name the national food regulator there was a strong belief that someone, somewhere ‘out there’ had the responsibility of regulating the quality and safety of food. The extent to which this is being done well by government was discussed, and in contrast to European findings (Poppe & Kjærnes 2007; Berg 2004), there was a belief that Australian authorities administered high standards, reflecting a high level of trust in food regulation. Giddens (1991) argues that trust is required where there is a lack of knowledge about the *trusted* by the *truster*, while for Luhmann (2000: 95) “trust is only required if a bad outcome would make you regret your action.” For Biltgard (2008) trust can be taken-for-granted and is habitual. Trust

is based on the assumption that the world will operate as it has before and that as long as this occurs trust is automatic (Misztsal 1996). We do not reflect on whether we should trust, but rather trust “because nothing has happened so far to indicate that we should not”(Biltgard 2008: 106). Habit reduces the complexity of the choice through the predictability of the social world resulting in action which is automatic rather than reflective, with trust only becoming a conscious choice when expectations are not met.

In this case participants display little knowledge of, but a good deal of trust in the social systems responsible for food regulation. Following Biltgard, a capacity to trust food regulation is habitual and taken for granted. This attitude that may be attributed in part, to a lack of bad outcomes in the form of major food scares. Lupton (2005) in comparable research, found that Australians placed little emphasis upon the food ‘threats’, including GM foods, BSE and food poisoning, identified in studies undertaken in other contexts. She attributes this to geographical isolation and a perception of limited food importation. A finding of lack of concern with food threats was replicated in this study with participants expressing confidence in governance of food. Any doubts about the role of government in food governance relate solely to the ability to monitor food standards. Indeed, policing or implementing the standards was readily acknowledged by participants as a difficult challenge, possibly reflecting the division of labour in food governance (Healy et al 2003; Sacks et al 2008). These results resonate with other studies of food trust which demonstrate that consumers are reasonably sanguine about the ability of the Australian regulatory system to successfully manage the food supply (Coveney 2007).

While the role of industry was cited there was greater ambivalence about its role in food regulation. It was clear that respondents expect certain standards of hygiene in

shops and stores and that these standards are established and policed by external agencies. This is contrary to British experience where public trust in government to maintain standards was damaged by high profile food scares (Wales et al 2006; Halkier & Holm 2006; Sassatelli & Scott 2001) resulting in greater reliance upon the establishment of industry standards to restore confidence (Halkier & Holm 2006; Havinga 2006). While there is evidence of “roll-out” neoliberalism in Australia evident in the separation of regulatory functions from government through the establishment of FSANZ; greater reliance upon the food industry to self-regulate food hygiene and the use of industry codes of practice to regulate areas such as food marketing (Guthman 2008; Handsley et al 2009; Henderson et al 2009; Hobbs et al 2002; Winger 2003) there was an expectation in this study, that the governance of food hygiene not be privatised, with concerns that the profit motive could prove to be a barrier to proper food governance. Havinga (2006) argues that while government and the food industry have common goals in protecting the food supply, food producers are essentially economic actors insofar as compliance with standards if not externally governed, may depend upon profit. Participants in this study echo this view. The fact that few respondents considered food producers, especially primary producers, as part of the regulatory framework in the food supply may indicate a particular trust in primary producers or alternately taken for granted trust in food production.

Finally, the role of the individual in taking a personal responsibility for food safety was evident. For Guthman (2008), neoliberalism is associated with subjectivities in which market rationalities are employed in day-to-day behaviour; that is, food choice is assumed to be made in relation to consideration of the costs and benefits of that product. This can be viewed as an example of the responsabilisation of food

consumption insofar as consumers are expected to protect themselves not only through food choice but also through food safety routines (Halkier et al. 2007). Strategies like observation of 'use by dates' and the visual cues given by food of questionable quality were mentioned frequently in this study. Further, it is evident that participants take their responsibility for food choice and food safety for granted. The responsabilisation of consumers is best exemplified by one respondent noting that "You've got to take responsibility for what you put in your mouth...." Despite acceptance of responsibility for informed consumption, there is little evidence of political consumerism in the form of involvement in consultation about food governance or with groups concerned with food politics (Halkier et al 2007). A lack of political consumerism may reflect few formal mechanisms for this involvement or alternately, lack of awareness of food governance mechanisms (*Australia and New Zealand Food Regulation Ministerial Council Principles and Protocols for the Development of Food Regulation Policy Guidelines* 2008).

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, when comparison is made with food regulation between Europe and in particular the United Kingdom and Australia it is clear that food regulation in both regions is informed by neoliberalism insofar as international free trade and food safety treaties have diminished the extent of control of national governments over internal food safety standards. In Europe this is reflected in the role of the European Food Safety Authority in advising on food safety principles and in Australia in the development of the bi-national regulatory board, FSANZ.

There are differences between regions however, primarily related to the degree of consumer involvement and transparency built into the system. Food scares in Europe

have resulted in food governance mechanisms which promote transparency through greater industry and consumer involvement in food governance (Wales et al 2006; Havinga 2006). Australia in contrast, has a fragmented food governance system which is largely in the hands of government and semi-governmental regulatory authorities with less transparency around food governance (Healy et al 2003; Sacks et al 2008). Despite, or even because of, this, Australian consumers display considerable trust in government to protect food safety, expressing concerns about the motives of private businesses. The level of trust in food governance suggests that this trust may be habitual and taken for granted arising from a lack of negative experiences of food safety (Biltgard 2008). As such, while consumers in this study can be understood as being 'responsibilised' insofar as they take personal responsibility for food safety, there is less evidence of the politicisation of food that is evident in research undertaken in Europe, (Poppe & Kjærnes 2007; Berg 2004) which may arise in part, from a lack of exposure to major food scares.

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<sup>i</sup> The 'Agreement on Sanitary and Phytosanitary measures' and 'Technical Barriers to Trade Agreement'

<sup>ii</sup> Three interviews were conducted with couples