

### ➤ AUSTRALIAN PET FOODS MEETING HIGH STANDARDS

The Pet Food Industry Association of Australia initially started as the Pet Food Manufacturers Association of Australia in the late 1960s, when manufacturers had to content with numerous regulations between various government departments in Australia, including different label laws in each state. The PFIAA became a single voice for the industry with a common goal of standardising protocols and procedures and to ensure members met the respective government regulations covering pet food.

Today, the Association represents more than 95% of processed pet foods sold in Australia, which are produced to some of the highest standards in the world, Dr Hall said.

"The pet food industry has been working with key state and federal government and non-government organisations, including the Australian Veterinary Association and the RSPCA, to develop an enhanced standard for pet food manufacturing and marketing in Australia," he said.

This Australian Standard (AS 5812) was approved in 2011 and extends across the entire process of pet food production and labelling requirements applicable to the making and marketing of pet foods in Australia. The Australian Standard has since been updated to the Australian Standard (AS 5812-2017) for the Manufacturing and Marketing of Pet Food. (For more information, visit [www.pfiaa.com.au](http://www.pfiaa.com.au))

"The Australian Standard helps assure the production and sale of safe and nutritious pet foods to Australian pet owners," Dr Hall said. "It is a voluntary standard and our members are encouraged to be certified."

To comply with AS5812, companies must undergo rigorous assessments, conducted by independent qualified auditors who inspect premises and assess conformance with processes and labelling as specified in the Standard.

"It was an effort to ensure that organisations understood their responsibilities to produce high quality,

safe pet foods, as well as a major commitment to the standardisation of product labelling and description. So, people understand what they are buying," said Dr Hall.

The first revision of the Australian Standard took place last year, resulting in major changes, such as the AS5812 to include chilled/raw pet meat, as well as changes to labelling requirements and preferences.

"We are trying to provide a more consistent and thorough labelling framework. This in some case, is a hard thing to achieve because of the confined label space. There needs to be a pragmatic approach," said Dr Hall.

The PFIAA is also part of an international alliance of pet food industry associations with the goal of increasing global standardisation. The Australian Standard now references both European and United States pet food nutritional recommendations, he said.

#### ARE TODAY'S PET FOODS SAFE?

Currently, Australia has no laws governing pet food safety – only a voluntary standard. The pet food industry has certainly come a long way over the past 50 years in providing quality pet food. Unfortunately, global pet food scandals are causing consumers to lose confidence in the food they're feeding their pets. Through online petitions and media interviews, pet lovers are demanding answers from pet food companies for the illness and even deaths of their beloved family companions.

Last month, Melbourne University announced it was investigating an outbreak of megaesophagus (a rare condition that causes the oesophagus to become enlarged and lose the ability to move food down to the stomach) and knew of 74 cases of megaesophagus where the dogs ate the pet food, Advance™ Dermocare.

Mars Petcare Australia voluntarily recalled the dry dog food, despite not finding a link between the product and megaesophagus, as stated on [www.advancepet.com.au](http://www.advancepet.com.au) at time of print. According to the statement, "Testing continues at pace to support the investigation by U-Vet at the University of Melbourne, and with advice from the Australian Veterinary Association and external veterinary experts."

The company has also commenced the process of contacting pet owners to provide support, including offering to reimburse vet bills. Pet owners who have purchased Advance™ Dermocare are also to receive a full refund at the store of purchase. No other ADVANCE™ products or varieties are affected by the recall.

If you check the American Veterinary Medical Association's (AVMA) website for Animal Food Recalls and Alerts, you will see numerous foods listed for dogs, cats and other animals, including sugar glider food for salmonella!

Dr Cailin Heinze at Tufts University's Cummings Veterinary Medical Centre (USA), lists most common reasons for pet food recalls in the university's blog, Petfoodology - the scientific study of pet nutrition by veterinary nutrition specialists and experts:

- Too much or too little nutrients – for example, too much vitamin D or not enough thiamine (vitamin B1)
- Bacterial contamination – most common in raw diets or treats such as pig ears
- Contaminants – melamine (2007), pentobarbital (2017)
- Foreign material – pieces of plastic or metal that broke off equipment or otherwise ended up with various ingredients

Even for serious recalls, a lot can be determined by how it is handled by the company, writes Dr Heinze. Do they take responsibility immediately or deny the issue? Do they make it clear what happened and how it will be prevented in the future, or do they blame others for their lack of oversight or control of their supply chain?

"Surprisingly, sometimes a product recall can mean that the company actually has 'better' quality control and integrity – because they're doing routine testing of ingredients and finished products, they realize that the product doesn't meet their specs and are willing to risk the negative publicity of a recall to make sure that only the highest quality product gets in the hands of the consumers," she says.

"It also gives the company an opportunity to review their safety and quality control procedures and improve them. These tend to be the recalls that the company