

# Policy Statement - The Precautionary Approach to Managing Food Safety Risks

---

Regulatory decisions and actions in response to food safety issues are based on best available science and the application of the Ministry of Agriculture's (MAF's) Risk Management Framework (RMF). Caution is inherent in MAF's standard development processes and non-mandatory regulatory activities. For further information refer to MAF's Risk Management Framework below.

In situations where available science identifies a significant risk to public health, but there is insufficient scientific evidence to complete an objective assessment of risk, MAF may provisionally adopt a precautionary food safety measure.

Where a precautionary food safety measure is adopted, MAF will endeavour to gain the additional scientific knowledge necessary to assess the effectiveness of the measure. This may include: commissioning of operational research, validation of the level of hazard control achieved by the control measure, risk assessment modelling, or implementing a monitoring programme. MAF will review the measure accordingly within a reasonable period of time.

## **Background to MAF's policy statement on the Precautionary Approach to Managing Food Safety Risks**

In the case of food in commerce and trade, the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Agreement) recognises the rights of countries to provisionally adopt precautionary measures to protect public health where a credible threat to food safety exists, but there is inadequate scientific evidence available to accurately assess the risks associated with the food.

In acknowledging that right, the SPS Agreement sets certain conditions that must be met when imposing a precautionary measure. If a precautionary measure is applied, the SPS Agreement requires that additional information is actively pursued by the government applying the measure to allow a more objective assessment of risk, and that the measure be reviewed against that information in a timely manner.

## **Further Information about MAF's Precautionary Approach**

[MPI's Precautionary Approach to Managing Food Safety Risks](#)

[SPS Agreement](#)

[MPI's Risk Management Framework](#)

[Slorach Review of MAF's Risk Management Framework](#)  
[Government Response to Slorach Review](#)

This page was last updated on 27 August 2009.