

Dodgy eateries escape the net

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A STATE government website set up to "name and shame" dodgy restaurants has outed only eight eateries in the past two years.

In comparison, the NSW Food Authority's website has published details of more than 600 in less than a year.

Queensland Health established the website in 2007 to allow diners access to reports of eating places found guilty of breaching the state Food Act.

Queensland Consumers Association secretary Max Howard said the NSW website publishes both prosecutions and on-the-spot fines and allows users to search by restaurant name, suburb, trading name or even postcodes.

But the Queensland website lists only successful prosecutions.

Mr Howard said that consumers should have the same right to check out restaurants as they do with health professionals such as doctors or dentists.

Shameful state

NSW	Name and shame website	QLD
Clearly linked via the front page www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au	No mention of file or link on the front page www.health.qld.gov.au	
All must be reported to Food Authority and are published	Fines and convictions published on web	Only successful Queensland Health prosecutions named
38 prosecutions and over 1000 penalties	How many listings	Seven prosecutions
\$70,000	Greatest fine levied	\$20,000
March 2009	Latest entry	May 2008

"Having a transparent mechanism would up the ante for eating areas. They run businesses for profit and consumers should have the benefit of knowing they are following the regulations," he said.

Restaurant and Catering Queensland president James Visser said members supported naming and shaming but found the website "disappointing".

"Members are keen for prosecutions to be properly reported — they don't want bad operators to get away with it," he said.

"We want council resources to be directed to problem areas and part of that strategy is to name people doing the wrong thing."

Local councils, who carry out the majority of inspections, have no legal onus to report fines or

prosecutions to Queensland Health for inclusion on the site. Instead each of the state's 74 councils keep their own records.

Mr Visser said the absence of proper reporting for serious offences made it difficult to collect statistical information in relation to issues such as food poisoning.

"As a governmental body, it's within Queensland Health's power to demand councils report serious offences to them, but there needs to be legislation in the Food Act to make it mandatory," Mr Visser said.

A Queensland Health spokesman said councils were "encouraged to include information relating to successful prosecutions on the Queensland Health register".

Sunshine Coast Regional Council healthy places manager Jason Brewer said he was unaware of the existence of the name and shame web page.

"I would certainly be a supporter but I've never been approached by Queensland Health and have had no information from them about it," he said.