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Operators of Chinatown restaurants in hotpot over poor hygiene

By **STEVE BUTCHER**

THE proprietor of a popular Melbourne Chinatown restaurant has been fined \$40,000 for food, cooking and hygiene conditions a magistrate said "you would not find in a kennel".

Magistrate Lesley Fleming was "sickened" by photographs at Nam Loong Restaurant in Russell Street, which showed live and dead cockroaches and rodent droppings.

Ms Fleming told Guo Jian Chen, 47, his premises endangered public safety and reminded him that salmonella and gastroenteritis from contaminated food had killed infants, the elderly and the infirm.

In 2004, Chen and his brother Hao Tang Chen were each fined \$10,000 after a customer found a dead cockroach in his meal.

Chen yesterday pleaded guilty to 11 charges that included failing to protect food from contamination and failing to eradicate and prevent the harbourage of pests.

In another case in Melbourne Magistrates Court, brought yesterday by the City of Melbourne

under the Food Act, Ms Fleming fined the manager of a second Russell Street restaurant \$15,000 on similar charges.

She described the conditions at Jenny Pan's Beijing Hot Pot and Dumpling Cafe as disgraceful.

"The community simply would not eat at the restaurant if they knew the state of its cleanliness," Ms Fleming said.

Trevor Wallwork, prosecuting, said a routine inspection of Nam Loong in July revealed numerous breaches under food laws.

Mr Wallwork listed examples of food stored in cleaning buckets, on floors and near contaminants, the accumulation of waste, dirt and grease and live and dead cockroaches.

While Chen later failed to act on some clean-up orders, council now accepted he had complied with all requests.

Defence barrister Tony Burns said language difficulties hindered Chen's appreciation of the council orders and the restaurant was now run more professionally.

Prosecutor Sebastian Reid

said charges against Pan, which she also pleaded guilty to, were issued after six inspections of her restaurant between January and June last year.

Mr Reid listed accumulated food scraps on the floor, widespread build-up of grease and dirt, exposed food and meat prepared in the toilet airlock.

Tim Smirthwaite, defending, said a psychologist's report confirmed that Pan had suffered at the time anxiety and stress with a relationship breakdown, which reduced her moral culpability.

Mr Smirthwaite said she had since spent \$35,000 refurbishing the premises, reducing its opening hours and employing more staff.

Ms Fleming convicted both defendants and ordered Chen to also pay \$1500 costs and Pan \$3000 in costs.

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