

AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND MINISTERIAL FORUM ON FOOD REGULATION

COMMUNIQUÉ

24 November 2017

The Australia and New Zealand Ministerial Forum on Food Regulation (the Forum) met in Melbourne today. The Forum is chaired by the Australian Government Assistant Minister for Health, Dr David Gillespie and Australian state and territory Ministers, the New Zealand Minister responsible for food safety and the Australian Local Government Association participate.

The Forum oversees the collaborative joint Australia and New Zealand food regulation system. The food regulation system is based on scientific evidence and expertise that protects the health and safety of consumers. The rigorous system reflects the many businesses and stakeholders in the food supply chain, providing a firm platform on which our food industries can operate.

Outcomes from the meeting included:

Food Regulation System priorities for 2017 - 2021

The Forum reaffirmed its commitment to the three food regulation system priority areas and noted the following progress:

- *Reducing foodborne illness*
Today, Forum Ministers provided in-principle support for the framework that outlines the vision, approach and objective for the national strategy for reducing foodborne illness in Australia. The development of the associated national strategy will commence in 2018 and will be undertaken in consultation with industry, the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee, the Public Health Laboratory Network, Communicable Diseases Network Australia and OzFoodNet.
- *Support public health objectives to reduce overweight and obesity*
Forum Ministers were provided with an overview of activities occurring in the states and territories to support the public health objective of reducing chronic disease related to overweight and obesity. Ministers expressed support for exploring two new opportunities in the national food system to support obesity prevention objectives. To further inform the collaboration effort, Forum Ministers agreed to two activities during 2018:
 - a symposium to promote the Health Star Rating System; and
 - a public health 'policy think tank' to develop a shared understanding among the public health community about what can be and what cannot be achieved in the food regulation system. Broader stakeholder consultation with consumer and food industry groups will follow prior to progressing any outcomes.
- *Maintaining a strong, robust and agile food regulation system*
The Australian and New Zealand economies greatly benefit from the current strong food regulation system successfully ensuring safe food. To maintain this success, Food Regulation Standing Committee is focusing on continues improvement in the following areas:
 - applying best-practice regulatory approaches;
 - strengthening engagement with consumers and stakeholders; and
 - maintaining robust data and monitoring systems.

Forum Ministers have asked that this work include ensuring the food regulation system can keep pace with new technologies and new food preferences.

Updating the approach to niche foods that are labelled ‘not for human consumption’

Forum Ministers are concerned about the activities of a small number of operators who seek to profit by introducing products into the market by deliberately avoiding or circumventing the food safety provisions that protects consumers. An example of this behaviour is labelling products that could be construed as food as "not for human consumption" and marketing them alongside bona-fide food products that meet regulatory requirements. Forum Ministers have agreed a statement that is attached to this communiqué.

ALCOHOL LABELLING

Pregnancy health warnings on alcohol products

The findings of the Australian and New Zealand evaluation of the voluntary labelling initiative to place pregnancy health warnings on alcohol products was presented to Ministers.

Industry uptake and implementation of the pregnancy health warnings on alcohol products have increased over time. However, there continue to be some product categories where adoption of the pregnancy health warning labels is low.

Forum Ministers asked the Food Regulation Standing Committee to expedite for earliest possible consideration development of a policy options consultations paper including: mandatory versus voluntary application; most appropriate pictogram; and most appropriate and most easy to understand message to discourage drinking during pregnancy.

Energy labelling of alcoholic beverages

Forum Ministers also considered energy labelling of alcoholic beverages. The responses to a targeted consultation activity in mid-2017 are being used to develop policy options for a wider public consultation which will be undertaken in early 2018.

The evaluation reports of the voluntary labelling initiative to place pregnancy health warnings on alcohol products and summary reports on the energy labelling of alcoholic beverages targeted consultation will be made available on the Food Regulation website.

Sugar free claims on alcohol

Forum Ministers are aware of an increasing number of alcoholic beverages for sale in Australia and New Zealand with the claim they are “% sugar-free”. Under the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code - Standard 1.2.7 - Nutrition, Health and Related Claims, nutrition content claims are not allowed on alcoholic beverages that contain more than 1.15% alcohol with the exception of claims about energy, gluten or carbohydrate.

Forum Ministers are concerned that these claims on alcoholic beverages are misleading and that alcohol is being promoted as a healthier choice for consumers when public health advice is to limit alcohol intake.

Forum Ministers have asked Food Standards Australia New Zealand to review the matter in relation to the Standard and claims about carbohydrate and its components, such as sugar claims about food containing more than 1.15% alcohol.

Sugar Labelling

In April 2017, the Forum Ministers agreed a work program on sugar that included:

- further evidence gathering activities by Food Standards Australia New Zealand on consumer understanding and behaviour;
- international approaches to sugar labelling; and
- an update of the policy context.

Noting the desire of Forum Ministers to take a whole-of-diet, holistic approach to food labelling, Forum Ministers considered that information about sugar provided on food labels does not provide adequate contextual information to enable consumers to make informed choices in support of dietary guidelines. Forum Ministers agreed to continue examining regulatory and non-regulatory options to address this issue.

Forum Ministers also noted the range of existing complementary initiatives outside of the food regulation system that address sugar intakes, such as the current review of the Health Star Rating system, policy work underway on the labelling of fats and oils, and the work of the Healthy Food Partnership.

Next Meeting

The next face to face meeting of the Forum is currently scheduled for 29 June 2018 in Brisbane.

Visit the food regulation website for further information on food regulation activities – www.foodregulation.gov.au.

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Updating the approach to niche foods that are labelled 'not for human consumption'

The food industry is a dynamic and growing part of the Australian and New Zealand economy. Food is traded worldwide through a diverse array of supply arrangements. Innovation in the production, manufacturing and packaging of food challenges existing controls designed to protect and promote the safety of the food that is sold and being consumed in Australia and New Zealand.

Forum Ministers are concerned about the activities of a small number of operators who seek to profit by introducing products into the market by deliberately avoiding or circumventing the food safety provisions that protects consumers. An example of this behaviour is labelling products that could be construed as food as "not for human consumption" and marketing them alongside bona-fide food products that meet regulatory requirements.

The food regulation system is faced with challenges from those who profit from the sale of such products; those consumers who actively seek out these products regardless of their regulatory status; and those who strive to ensure clear, unambiguous and truthful information about food safety risks is available to all consumers.

The supply of safe and suitable food relies on the food regulatory system that is a formal collaborative system between the Australian Government, New Zealand Government and the states and territories. The strength of this system is a strategic asset in terms of public health and trade for both domestic and export markets. It is vital that the robust and responsive nature of these arrangements is maintained.

The Australian and New Zealand Ministerial Forum on Food Regulation (the Forum) is committed to maintaining the integrity of the food regulation system.

Food Regulation Standing Committee will explore any challenges to doing so. Jurisdictional regulators will continue to take strong and effective compliance action against those who deliberately seek to circumvent food safety controls established in the food regulatory system.