

# AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND MINISTERIAL FORUM ON FOOD REGULATION

## FINAL COMMUNIQUÉ

29 June 2018

The Australia and New Zealand Ministerial Forum on Food Regulation (the Forum) met today to consider a range of food regulation matters. The Forum comprises all Australian and New Zealand Ministers responsible for food regulation, and the Australian Local Government Association. The Forum oversees the collaborative joint Australia and New Zealand Food Regulation System. The meeting was chaired by the Australian Government Minister for Rural Health, Senator the Hon. Bridget McKenzie.

### Key outcomes from the meeting include:

#### FOOD REGULATION SYSTEM PRIORITIES FOR 2017 - 2021

During the meeting today, the Forum made significant progress on a number of activities that shape the implementation of the three Food Regulation System priorities for 2017- 2021.

#### **Reduce foodborne illness, particularly related to *Campylobacter* & *Salmonella* (Priority 1)**

##### Australian Foodborne Illness Reduction Strategy 2018-2021+

A key activity in the priority to *Reduce foodborne illness, particularly related to Campylobacter & Salmonella* has today been endorsed and Forum Ministers are very pleased to launch the **Australian Foodborne Illness Reduction Strategy 2018-2021+**. This strategy is the result of extensive national and jurisdictional consultation with stakeholders. The strategy will shortly be available on the Food Regulation website.

##### Food Safety Management for General Food Service and Closely Related Retail Sectors

The *Policy Guideline on Food Safety Management for General Food Service and Closely Related Retail Sectors* recognises that sector-specific regulatory and non-regulatory measures may be required to manage food safety risks consistently across all Australian states and territories.

Implementation of the Policy Guideline remains a priority for the Food Regulation System and Forum Ministers note that food safety outcomes can be improved through further work at the national level and in partnership with stakeholders. Following recent stakeholder engagement with industry and local government, possible options for nationally consistent food safety arrangements were identified. Forum Ministers have requested Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) to consider a proposed package of regulatory and non-regulatory measures for Australia to better manage risks in the sectors covered by the Policy Guideline. Work in this area will consider the impact on small and medium business.

Forum Ministers noted that a template is already available in New Zealand for use by the food service and food retail sector to implement requirements of the Food Act.

##### Food safety risks associated with high risk horticulture products in Australia

Forum Ministers noted the recent increase of foodborne illness outbreaks in Australia and agreed that there is a need to reassess the food safety risk management of the five high risk horticulture sectors: ready to eat, minimally processed fruits and vegetables, fresh leafy green vegetables, melons, berries, and sprouts.

Forum Ministers requested that FSANZ identify appropriate regulatory and non-regulatory measures for Australia to manage food safety risks in these sectors.

## **Support public health objectives to reduce chronic disease related to overweight and obesity (Priority 2)**

Forum Ministers endorsed the *Consultation Summary Report: Review of fast food menu labelling schemes*, and agreed that further targeted consultation is to be undertaken to develop policy options that aim to improve and strengthen fast food menu labelling in Australia. A broader range of stakeholders will be engaged in the next stage of the consultation. The Consultation Summary Report will be available on the Food Regulation website shortly.

### Sugar Labelling

Forum Ministers noted the substantial work that has been progressed towards the development of a range of policy options for sugar labelling and agreed to continue examining regulatory and non-regulatory options. Public consultation on a range of policy options in relation to the labelling of sugars on food and drinks will be undertaken from July to September 2018. The commencement of the consultation will be notified on the Food Regulation website.

Forum Ministers also noted that there are a 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 and the work of the Healthy Food Partnership.

### Fats and oils

Forum Ministers considered a review paper on the labelling of fats and oils and acknowledged that in relation to public health, consumers' ability to identify saturated and/or mono and polyunsaturated fats in food is limited due to a lack of labelling information. Ministers noted that the Food Regulation System does not permit the development of standards that are based on ecological concerns.

Further options by the National Health and Medical Research Council and the Food Regulation Standing Committee (FRSC) should progress and advice be provided to Ministers in mid-2019.

## **Maintaining a strong, robust and agile Food Regulation System (Priority 3)**

The Australian and New Zealand economies greatly benefit from the Food Regulation System successfully assuring food safety and maintaining our reputation for safe food.

Forum Ministers agreed today that the central focus of work to deliver Priority 3 is 'applying best practice regulatory approaches'. This will ensure the Food Regulation System is agile, responsible and robust. The three supporting areas are:

- awareness of and responsiveness to technological and business innovations;
- strengthening engagement and partnerships with stakeholders; and
- supporting the Food Regulation System with robust data and monitoring.

As part of this work the FRSC will explore our readiness to respond to innovation such as 'smart label' technology and is working with industry and other stakeholders to understand how the Food Regulation System can accommodate – and leverage – this new technology.

The Chair of FSANZ reported back to the Forum on work that the FSANZ Board, in conjunction with key stakeholders, has been carrying out on modernisation of FSANZ activities within the context of the wider Food Regulatory System. This work includes consideration of FSANZ legislation and how it can leverage its core expertise to effectively support the System in the context of changing technologies and expectations.

FSANZ, in conjunction with FRSC will consider changes particularly in relation to timeliness and proportionality and an initial report will be provided to the Forum in December 2018. This will be followed by key stakeholder engagement and public consultation.

## **Human Milk**

The Forum notes that the FRSC has considered the regulatory and other complexities associated with the importation of human milk and its products including ethical concerns.

The Forum supports Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council's recent decision that the Clinical Principal Committee with membership of jurisdictional Chief Medical Officers, consider the range of issues identified.

## **Health Star Rating system update**

Forum Ministers were pleased to hear that in Australia there are now at least 165 companies that have adopted the Health Star Rating (HSR) system, with more than 10,300 products displaying the HSR system graphic, and more than 3,900 products in New Zealand. Forum Ministers commend these companies for their ongoing support, collaboration and leadership to provide Australian and New Zealand consumers with information that assists them to choose healthier packaged food options.

The National Heart Foundation of Australia monitors and tracks consumer awareness, attitudes and interaction with the HSR system in Australia. Forum Ministers noted the most recent report findings from the survey undertaken during December 2017 to March 2018. Results have remained strong as indicated by the following results:

- The HSR is the most well recognised food logo when prompted, with 84 percent of respondents aware of the HSR system – a significant increase since September 2015 (53 percent).
- A majority of respondents believe the system is easy to use (76 percent), understand (76 percent), and makes choosing food easier (63 percent).
- 71 percent agree that the HSR system helps consumers identify healthier options within the same food category.

Forum Ministers also noted the progress of the independent review of the HSR system and that consultation on the draft review report is planned for early 2019.

## **Sugar and carbohydrate 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.

At today's meeting, Forum Ministers noted a technical assessment prepared by FSANZ on this issue and noted that in addition to the identified issues concerning sugar claims there is also issues more broadly concerning carbohydrate claims on food that contain alcohol. Based on the technical assessment, FSANZ has agreed to raise a proposal to clarify Standard 1.2.7 of the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code in line with the original policy intent that prohibits claims on alcoholic beverages in relation to sugar and carbohydrate. This work will be undertaken over the next 12 months and includes stakeholder consultation.

## **Next Meeting**

Forum Ministers asked for the next face to face meeting of the Forum to be held in October pending confirmation by all Ministers that a suitable date can be arranged.

Visit the Food Regulation website for further information on food regulation activities – [www.foodregulation.gov.au](http://www.foodregulation.gov.au).