FOOD MINISTERS PROGRESS FOOD LABELLING

The thirteenth meeting of the Australia and New Zealand Food Regulation Ministerial Council (Ministerial Council) was held in Sydney today. The Ministerial Council comprises Ministers responsible for food issues in Australia and New Zealand.

The meeting today was chaired by Senator the Hon. Jan McLucas, Parliamentary Secretary to the Australian Government Minister for Health and Ageing. The Ministerial Council considered a number of strategic policy and food standards issues.

Comprehensive Review of Food Labelling Law and Policy
The meeting agreed to the Terms of Reference for an independent, comprehensive review of food labelling law and policy. The review panel is yet to be confirmed but will comprise prominent individuals who collectively possess knowledge and expertise in the fields of public policy/economics, public health, law consumer behaviour and business. The review is to be chaired by an independent public policy expert who will be selected by the Ministerial Council once funding for the review has been secured.

Front of Pack Labelling
The Ministerial Council noted that progress has been made and that the stakeholder consultation on the development of a Policy Guideline for front of pack labelling (FOPL) is complete. The consultation confirmed that there are currently divergent views in relation to FOPL. The draft Policy Guideline is to be provided to the October 2009 Ministerial Council meeting.

Health warnings on packaged alcohol
The Ministerial Council considered a report on alcohol warning labels and the evidence of their effectiveness on risky alcohol consumption. The report was developed in response to the Council of Australian Governments’ (COAG) announcement to curb alcohol misuse and binge drinking among young people. Today the Ministerial Council has agreed to provide this report to the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy to allow a single and coordinated response to COAG as a part of its broad and comprehensive approach to reducing binge drinking.
Trans fatty acids in the Australian and New Zealand food supply
The Ministerial Council received a progress report on dietary modelling activities in relation to trans fatty acid intakes in the Australian and New Zealand food supplies, a review of recent scientific literature regarding the link between dietary intake of trans fatty acids and adverse health outcomes and a report on the progress of voluntary initiatives by industry to reduce trans fatty acids in the food supply. It is anticipated that the final report on trans fatty acid intakes will be presented to the Ministerial Council at its next meeting in October 2009.

Negotiations to amend the joint Food Standards Treaty
The Ministerial Council was informed that negotiations between Australia and New Zealand to amend the ‘Agreement between the Government of Australia and the Government of New Zealand Concerning a Joint Food Standards System’ have commenced and are progressing well.

FSANZ Proposal P290 – Food Safety Programs for Catering Operations
The Ministerial Council agreed in-principle to review its policy guideline Food Safety Management in Australia – Food Safety Programs in relation to the food service sector (excluding existing requirements applying to food service to vulnerable populations) pending further advice to be provided to its next meeting.

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