Today, Australian and New Zealand Ministers responsible for food regulation considered a range of issues including Front of Pack Labelling, progress on pregnancy warnings on alcohol products, and a review of the Central Interpretative Advice Service established to reduce regulatory burden to business.

The Legislative and Governance Forum on Food Regulation (the Forum) meeting was held in Sydney and chaired by the Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing, the Hon Shayne Neumann MP.

**Front-of-Pack Labelling**

In December 2011, the Forum agreed to the development of an interpretive front-of-pack labelling system for Australia. This was a key priority identified in the Forum response to the Food Labelling Review Report, Labelling Logic.

Today, following a collaborative process in Australia which included public health and consumer groups, industry and government, Ministers considered recommendations about the proposed front-of-pack food labelling system for Australia.

The Forum congratulated the group and acknowledged the considerable progress made in developing the system that has been named ‘Health Star Rating’. The system will give consumers at-a-glance information about the food they are buying. The system uses a star rating scale of ½ to 5 stars. Foods with more stars are a better nutritional choice. The system will also include nutrient information icons for energy (kilojoules), saturated fat, sodium (salt), sugars and can include one positive nutrient such as calcium or fibre.

Food Regulation Ministers noted that the system has significant potential to support consumers to make healthier food choices and acknowledged that FoPL is one tool in a suite of initiatives that will, in the long-term, contribute to alleviating the burden of chronic disease, overweight and obesity issues in Australia.

The preferred implementation option in Australia is a voluntary system, subject to there being consistent and widespread uptake of FoPL. If, following evaluation after two years, a voluntary implementation is found to be unsuccessful, a mandatory approach will be required. This would require Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) to develop a standard.
Ministers agreed that the remaining technical issues in respect of a modified Nutrient Profiling Scoring Criterion concerning dairy will be submitted to the Forum for decision by December 2013. Other remaining technical issues will be considered by the existing committee (Project Committee) which has guided development of this scheme.

New Zealand noted the discussion on FoPL in Australia, and will continue to work on voluntary approaches to FoPL.

**Pregnancy warnings on Alcohol Labels**

In December 2011, Food Regulation Ministers agreed to provide the alcohol industry a two-year period to adopt voluntary initiatives to place pregnancy warnings on labels of alcohol products.

Food Regulation Ministers noted that a project to evaluate action taken by the alcohol industry in Australia in placing pregnancy warnings on alcohol products will commence shortly. The independent evaluation will be conducted in three stages. During the first stage the evaluation framework will be developed in consultation with stakeholders. The second stage will include an analysis of industry initiatives and economic impacts, with a quantitative analysis of the labelling initiative planned for stage three.

New Zealand will also be undertaking an evaluation of the New Zealand industry’s voluntary labelling initiatives.

Interim and final reports will be provided to Food Regulation Ministers in December 2013 and March 2014 respectively. While it was agreed to await the outcome of the independent review, Food Regulation Ministers have asked FSANZ to provide advice on the steps that would be required to regulate and have agreed to hold an extraordinary meeting as soon as the review report becomes available.

**Review of the Central Interpretive Advice Service**

At today’s meeting, Ministers also endorsed the Terms of Reference for the review of the Central Interpretive Advice Service which was established as part of the ‘National Seamless Economy’ reforms.

The Service aims to provide consistent advice on the interpretation of Chapters 1 and 2 of the Food Standards Code, dealing primarily with labelling and composition matters.

At the time the Service commenced it was agreed that it should be reviewed two years after implementation. The findings of this review will be considered in mid-2014.

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