The ninth meeting of the Australia and New Zealand Food Regulation Ministerial Council was held in Sydney today, chaired by Christopher Pyne, Parliamentary Secretary to the Australian Government Minister for Health and Ageing.

The Ministerial Council comprises Ministers responsible for food issues in Australia and New Zealand. At the meeting today, the Ministerial Council considered a number of policy and food standards issues, several of which are still in train and will be reported on after the next meeting of the Ministerial Council in May 2007. Matter considered today included:

**Policy Guideline for the Regulation of residues of agricultural and veterinary chemicals in food**

The Ministerial Council has agreed to a Policy Guideline on Regulation of Low Level Residues from Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals in Food. This Policy Guideline will be forwarded to Food Standards Australia New Zealand for considering alternative approaches to the current zero tolerance approach to the regulation of residues of agricultural and veterinary chemicals in food.

Currently, where there is no Maximum Residue Limit (MRL) set in the Food Standards Code for residues of agricultural and veterinary chemicals, a zero tolerance approach is enforced. Therefore, foods containing low levels of residues of agricultural and veterinary chemicals with no MRL become illegal for sale, even if they pose no significant risk to public health. Mandatory enforcement action results in substantial imposts on industry and enforcement agencies that are not commensurate with the risks posed.

**National Food Safety Audit Policy**

The Ministerial Council has agreed to a National Food Safety Audit Policy. The Policy will promote uniformity and consistency in the management of food safety auditors and auditing within Australia, and where possible, facilitate equivalence with New Zealand. The Policy will be implemented over the next five years.

The Food Regulation Standing Committee will now develop an implementation plan for the Policy to identify resource requirements, accountabilities and specific timeframes.
Mandatory Fortification with Folate

All Ministerial Council members reinforced their commitment to reduce the number of neural tube defects through mandatory fortification with folic acid as quickly as possible.

The Ministerial Council discussed the Final Assessment Report from Food Standards Australia New Zealand on a proposal for consideration of mandatory fortification of food with folic acid.

Food Standards Australia New Zealand have been asked to review the proposed standard due to technical considerations with the implementation of the standard, and compliance issues, within six months.

Trans Fatty Acids

The Ministerial Council received an update from Food Standards Australia New Zealand on its review of the level of trans fatty acids in Australian food.

This work is being done as there is worldwide concern about the potential health effects of trans fatty acids, particularly those that are derived from partially hydrogenated vegetable oils and there has been no recently published estimates of total trans fatty acid intake in Australia or New Zealand.

Food Standards Australia New Zealand expects to provide a final report on this matter to the Ministerial Council at its next meeting in May 2007.

Front of Pack Nutrition Labelling System.

Ministerial Council members considered a proposal to examine a front of pack nutrition labelling scheme, including traffic light labelling similar to one in the UK, that provides consumers at a glance information about nutritional content of foods.

Council members agreed to ask the Food Regulation Standing Committee to explore and report to the Council at its next meeting whether a uniform front-of-pack food labelling system would be an effective health strategy, and to advise on the efficacy of a range of options for such a labelling system, which may include the traffic light labelling system, the behavioural labelling system and any other options.

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