

AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND MINISTERIAL FORUM ON FOOD REGULATION COMMUNIQUE

15 November 2019

The Australia and New Zealand Ministerial Forum on Food Regulation (the Forum) met today in Christchurch New Zealand to consider a range of food regulation and policy matters. The Forum comprises all Australian and New Zealand Ministers responsible for food, and the Australian Local Government Association, and is chaired by Senator the Hon Richard Colbeck.

Key outcomes from the meeting include:

HEALTH STAR RATING FIVE-YEAR REVIEW

The Forum considered the [Health Star Rating system five-year review report](#) and its ten recommendations for enhancing the Health Star Rating system. Forum Ministers noted that the Health Star Rating system is a useful tool to assist consumers in making healthy food choices, and agreed that it should continue with some amendments resulting from the review. Forum ministers supported the majority of the recommendations contained within the review report, noting that some recommendations require funding support and will need to be considered further in the context of an implementation plan.

Forum Ministers noted that the intent of the system is for processed, packaged multi-ingredient foods and discussed the role of the system in relation to fresh fruit and vegetables. It was noted and agreed that for some minimally processed foods such as canned and frozen fruits and vegetables having a 5 star rating may be beneficial to consumers. Based on this discussion Forum Ministers requested that the Food Regulation Standing Committee (FRSC) provide advice on the implementation of this recommendation including definitions for minimally processed fruits and vegetables.

Forum Ministers support changes to the algorithm identified in recommendation 4b, c, and d subject to a peer review of the modelling of these changes by Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) and further advice from FRSC on sugars and sodium levels in the calculator.

Ministers agreed to recommendation 9 regarding that the system continue to be voluntary with options for interim targets in the 5-year period to be considered as part of the implementation plan.

In addition to the recommendations contained in the report, Forum Ministers also agreed to request that FRSC consider the way edible oils are treated under the Health Star Rating system and provide technical advice on oils to the Forum in early 2020.

The Forum's response paper which outlines their decisions in detail will be published on the Food Regulation website within the coming weeks. Consideration of outstanding issues and an implementation plan for agreed changes to the Health Star Rating system will be considered by the Forum in early 2020.

MODERNISATION OF THE FOOD REGULATION SYSTEM

The Forum today endorsed an ambitious plan to reform the Bi-national Food Regulation System (the System) to ensure it remains strong, robust and agile into the future. A key element underpinning the reform agenda is a comprehensive review of the *Food Standards Australia New Zealand Act 1991* (FSANZ Act).

This decision reflects the knowledge that the System is operating in a complex operating environment with changing consumer expectations and significant technological advancements. Forum Ministers consider that the time is right for a fundamental examination of the way the System works and has endorsed a strategic plan that will be used to guide reforms to the System. The strategic plan includes pursuing new institutional and legislative foundations for the System.

The Forum recognises that governments, industry, consumers and public health advocates in both countries play an important role in the joint Food Regulation System. All relevant stakeholders will be engaged in this reform process.

MISLEADING DESCRIPTIONS OF FOOD

Concerns have been raised by some stakeholders that the labelling and naming of plant-based alternatives to animal-derived products may be misleading to consumers, while other stakeholders have indicated that they considered these products are beneficial to both consumers and the economy. Plant-based 'milk' and 'meat' products are gaining popularity and today the Forum discussed how these products are referred to in the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code. Ministers recognised the value of the meat and dairy sector to the Australian and New Zealand, diet and economy, but also recognised the growing value of the alternative products sector and agreed that both have a place in the market for consumers.

Ministers discussed the issue of 'synthetic' or laboratory-based products including animal cells grown in a culture rather than products from animals raised on a farm. Ministers noted claims that manmade and synthetic foods are trading on the intellectual properties of primary producers and appealing to the unconscious values consumers attach to natural products like dairy and meat products.

Ministers also noted the measures that the European Union and within the United States of America have introduced to protect the intellectual property of producers, particularly dairy and meat. Ministers asked FRSC for its consideration of regulatory and labelling issues relating to these foods, with a view to developing a policy guideline to adequately differentiate 'synthetic' animal products from their natural or conventional equivalents.

Next Meeting

The next Forum meeting is scheduled to be in held in early 2020.