

AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND MINISTERIAL FORUM ON FOOD REGULATION

COMMUNIQUE

19 August 2019

The Australia and New Zealand Ministerial Forum on Food Regulation (the Forum) met on 16 August 2019 to consider a range of food regulation 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 Health Star Rating (HSR) system is in its fifth year of voluntary implementation and has undergone a formal five year review. The review has been conducted by an independent reviewer, mpconsulting.

Forum Ministers noted the HSR system is generally progressing well with uptake increasing, consumer use and understanding improving, consumers changing behaviour in response to the HSR, and evidence of industry reformulating foods. There is, however, significant opportunity to continue to improve the HSR system.

Forum Ministers will seek advice on the recommendations before making a formal decision at their next meeting in November 2019.

The final review report will be publicly available via the HSR website in the coming week.

SUPPORTING THE PUBLIC HEALTH OBJECTIVES TO REDUCE CHRONIC DISEASE RELATED TO OVERWEIGHT AND OBESITY

The Forum recognised the Food Regulation System alone cannot address the rising prevalence of overweight and obesity and associated chronic diseases, and that taking action on this issue requires a multi-sectorial approach.

Forum Ministers agreed to a program of activities, including improved data collection, to contribute towards reducing chronic disease related to obesity. These activities include exploring the development of options for setting compositional limits for certain foods and beverages; partnering with regulators for advertising and marketing to develop options to strengthen policies on advertising of unhealthy foods and drinks to children; and developing a Policy Guideline on food labelling to enable consumers to make informed healthy food choices. Ongoing consultation will occur with stakeholders as this work progresses.

LABELLING OF SUGARS ON PACKAGED FOODS AND DRINKS

Forum Ministers maintain their commitment for Australian and New Zealand consumers to have food labels which provide adequate contextual information about sugars to enable consumers to make informed choices in support of the dietary guidelines.

Forum Ministers noted a *Policy Paper: Labelling of sugars on packaged foods and drinks* prepared by the Food Regulation Standing Committee (FRSC). Based on the Policy Paper, the Forum agreed to request that Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) review nutrition labelling for added sugars, noting that the option to quantify added sugars in the nutrition information panel best met the desired outcome. Furthermore, the Forum agreed

that a pictorial approach applied to sugary beverages / sugar-sweetened beverages warrants further consideration, along with other options, pending the response to the HSR five-year review.

The Forum further agreed that any label changes that may result should be accompanied by education to support consumers to understand sugars labelling and make informed healthy choices.

The *Policy Paper: Labelling of sugars on packaged foods and drinks* will be published on the Food Regulation website in the coming week.

FAST FOOD MENU BOARD LABELLING

Fast food menu board labelling is mandatory in five Australian jurisdictions and is currently voluntary in New Zealand. The scheme aims to provide information to consumers about the energy content of fast food options.

At the meeting, the Forum agreed that nationally consistent menu labelling is desirable both for the food industry, public health organisations and governments. Ministers agreed that the most effective way for this to occur would be to develop a food regulatory measure under the Australia and New Zealand Food Standards Code (the Code). As a first step, the Forum agreed to develop a Ministerial Policy Guideline in line with best practice regulatory requirements. Ongoing consultation will occur with stakeholders as this work progresses.

FERMENTED BEVERAGES

Ministers were provided with an update on the actions taken in response to findings of a survey that revealed the presence of undeclared alcohol in a number of fermented beverages, which therefore failed to comply with current liquor licensing legislation and Standards within the Code. Stakeholders have been advised that action will be taken if products are found to be non-compliant with the Code and with the various Liquor Licensing Acts that apply in each state and territory.

SALMONELLA ENTERITIDIS

Forum members were provided with an overview of locally acquired *Salmonella* Enteritidis in Australia, which is an emerging issue with over two hundred confirmed outbreak cases reported. A significant amount of work has been undertaken by governments, especially in New South Wales, and by industry to limit the spread of *Salmonella* Enteritidis. All Australian jurisdictions are engaged through multiple coordinated responses to this outbreak given the multijurisdictional health and on farm nature of the issue. New Zealand is liaising with Australian officials on this matter.

OUT-OF-SESSION

In addition to items discussed at the meeting, the Forum also ratified a number of recent decisions from out-of-session processes.

Modernisation of the food regulation system

The Forum has endorsed a package of improvements to the food regulation system that can be immediately implemented, including the updated *Principles and Protocols for the Development of Food Regulation Policy Guidance*. This initial package of measures was the result of a workshop and follow-up work undertaken by FRSC earlier this year, and is focused on improving agility and timeliness within the current regulatory system.

A second phase of work will consider more significant changes which may require amendments to legislation. These long-term changes will aim to further modernise and future-proof the system. A proposal for a way forward is to be presented to the next Forum meeting.

Energy labelling of alcoholic beverages

Currently, consumers' ability to understand the energy contribution that alcohol makes to their diet is severely limited, as alcoholic beverages are exempt from providing nutrition information on the label. FRSC has undertaken preliminary analysis on potential regulatory and non-regulatory policy options to address this issue and support consumers to make informed purchasing choices and consumption decisions.

The Forum agreed to refer the work on energy labelling on alcoholic beverages to FSANZ and request FSANZ consider energy labelling as part of the work relating to alcohol labelling which is already underway, but not to delay the work on developing pregnancy warning labels for alcoholic beverages.

Next Meeting

The next Forum meeting will be in November 2019.

Visit the Food Regulation website for further information on food regulation activities – www.foodregulation.gov.au