Australia and New Zealand Ministerial Forum on Food Regulation

FINAL COMMUNIQUÉ

30 January 2015

The Australia and New Zealand Ministerial Forum on Food Regulation (the Forum) met in Auckland today and considered a range of matters including an update on the Health Star Rating (HSR) system, the review of low THC hemp as a food and production and processing requirements for approved raw milk products.

The Forum comprises all Australian and New Zealand Ministers responsible for food regulation, and is chaired by the Australian Government Assistant Minister for Health, Senator the Hon Fiona Nash.

Unpasteurised (raw) milk not for human consumption
The Forum is extremely concerned about consumption of unpasteurised (raw) cow’s milk that is sold as ‘bath milk’, a cosmetic product labelled ‘not for human consumption’.

People who consume raw milk are at an increased risk of infection causing severe illness and potentially death. The Forum noted the current actions being taken; agreed that further urgent action is required; and that a national approach is required in Australia to prevent the consumption of raw cow’s milk.

The Forum will ask the Legislative and Governance Forum on Consumer Affairs to facilitate the development of a joint public health, food safety and consumer law solution that will deliver a consistent approach across all Australian jurisdictions. A working group will be formalised, and will initially look at urgent interim measures to protect public health.

Health Star Rating System
Today the Forum was provided with an update on progress in implementing the Health Star Rating (HSR) system.

The Forum was pleased to note that the information campaign (including the HSR website – www.healthstarrating.gov.au) was launched on 6 December 2014. The website supports the implementation of the HSR system, providing consumers with information about what the stars mean and encourages increased industry participation. The Forum welcomed the news that approximately 200 products displaying the HSR label are now available on supermarket shelves across Australia.

The second wave of an information campaign will be launched in Australia soon. The Forum agreed to greater collaboration between jurisdictions to ensure the marketing of the Health Star Rating is conducted in concert with broader public health promotion by jurisdictions.

The Forum noted that New Zealand is making substantial progress in implementing the HSR system in New Zealand, with HSR already on some products and there is expected to be significant uptake in the second half of 2015.

Progress made in relation to the Government Response to the Food Labelling Review
The Forum has made substantial progress on implementing a range of recommendations from the Government’s response to the food labelling review, Labelling Logic. The Forum will publish a progress report on the Food Labelling Review website shortly.
Review of Low THC Hemp as a Food
The Forum considered FSANZ’s review of Application 1039 – low tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) hemp as a food. The Forum, at its meeting in December 2012, had requested FSANZ review its decision in relation to draft variations to the Code arising from Application 1039 that considers the permission of foods derived from the seeds of low THC hemp. FSANZ has reviewed its decision and re-affirmed its support of the variation to the Code.

The Forum resolved to reject the proposed variation to Standard 1.4.4 – Prohibited and Restricted Plants and Fungi, resulting from Application A1039. The Forum noted that FSANZ found that foods derived from the seeds of low THC hemp do not present any safety concerns as food, and that concerns regarding the impact on police THC drug testing fall beyond the remit of FSANZ.

Several concerns were raised by some Forum Members, including law enforcement issues, particularly from a policing perspective in relation to roadside drug testing, cannabidiol levels as well as the marketing of hemp in food may send a confused message to consumers about the acceptability and safety of Cannabis.

The Forum agreed that further work would be undertaken promptly to consider law enforcement, roadside drug testing and marketing concerns in consultation with relevant Ministers.

Primary Production and Processing Requirements for Approved Raw Milk Cheese Products
The Forum accepted an amendment to the Food Standards Code to allow the safe production of raw milk cheese products resulting from proposal 1022.

The Forum noted that the risk assessment shows that the processing that these raw milk cheese products undergo, together with the application of stringent microbiological standards, to ensure they are safe.

Code Revision
The Forum accepted the revision of the Food Standards Code that resulted from proposal 1025. The revision reduces uncertainty about the permissions to add substances to foods that are currently permitted. The revision is a step in an ongoing process of review to improve the Code.

Labelling of Trans Fatty Acids
The Forum accepted the advice of FSANZ that, given the low level of Trans Fatty Acids (TFA) in the foods sampled in Australia and New Zealand, mandatory labelling does not appear warranted. The Code currently permits the voluntary declaration of TFA content on labels and requires TFA declaration when certain nutrition content and health claims are made.

The Forum was pleased that the consumption of TFA in Australia and New Zealand remains low and is below the World Health Organisation recommended levels.

Next Meeting
The next meeting of the Forum will be held in July 2015 in Hobart.

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