

# FOOD LABELLING AND POLICY AND LAW REVIEW

## PUBLIC CONSULTATION Darwin, Casuarina Plaza Via Teleconference 16 April 2010

*The views expressed in this document are the consultation attendees and not necessarily those of the Food Labelling Review Committee. The Committee will not be legally responsible for any statement made in this document.*

Committee member attendees: Dr Neal Blewett and Assoc Professor Heather Yeatman.

Attendees at the public consultation included representatives from industry and government. The list of attendees is attached.

### **PART 1: CONTEXT**

#### **Consultation Paper / Format / Focus of Review**

#### **Matters for Review / Terms of Reference General and Specific / Tensions in the Terms of Review**

##### Comments from attendees included:

- Labelling in terms of public health often slides down the list of priorities. Labelling is seen as important but scarce resources will see enforcement priorities directed elsewhere.
- Comment that the group consisted mainly of enforcement officers and nutritionists with one industry representative.
- Current NT initiative involving piloting of country of origin labelling of fish at retail sale. Discussed the difficulties for Australian producers of seafood to compete in the market place without the ability to differentiate product. Australian producers require the ability to market themselves.
- Labelling is necessary in enable consumers to make food choices relevant for themselves.

### **PART 2: FOOD LABELLING OVERVIEW**

##### Comments from attendees included:

- Exemption of food requiring labelling that are made and packaged on the premises or packaged in the presence of consumer. Does not allow Australian producers to be able to market their product effectively.
- Essential information requires placement on the label for consumer information purposes.

## **PART 3: KEY ROLES OF FOOD LABELLING**

### **Concerns Driving Labelling / Health Safety / Health Promotion/ Consumer Information**

#### Comments from attendees included:

- Comment on the practice of selling food in altered state from what was originally intended and the subsequent relevance of date marking. It is common in NT remote communities to sell food that may have been intended as fresh as frozen (eg bread, meat) and therefore date marks are no longer relevant. This practice generates a lot of anxiety for consumers. Problem – illegal to alter label, so can't provide additional advice to reflect different storage conditions of food.
- Also commented on lack of consumer information for products that do not require date marking because of very long shelf life. Store turnover is often low and therefore consumers may be buying products that have been on the shelves for many years.
- Discussion about consumer information including the validity of additional information such as animal welfare and carbon footprints. Needs to be considered, does not have to be mandatory but consistency of terms used would be beneficial.
- Consumers need information on the meaning of terms used on labels, for example, what is light/lite referring to? Light in colour or low fat? No consistency.
- Labelling does have a role in health promotion. High levels of preventable chronic disease, much of which relates to poor diet.
- Should steer clear of high level health claims, claims need to be evidence based.

### **Alcohol**

#### Comments from attendees included:

- Issue is another example of “nanny state” government.
- Alcohol contributes to the overall energy intake, the requirements for nutrition information labelling should be the same for any other beverage such as soft drink. Business is also using nutrition information to differentiate their product eg low carbohydrate beer.
- Alcohol misuse is a huge issue for the Territory

## **PART 4: FOOD LABELLING PRESENTATION**

### **Readability / Comprehension / Information Format**

#### Comments from attendees included:

- Labels need to be easy to understand. For the indigenous population of the NT, English is often a second or third language. Literacy and numeracy levels

are quite low. Simple system required to help guide consumers to healthy food choices eg traffic light labelling.

- There is currently no standard format for a label, other than the nutrition information panel. It would be helpful to have consistent placement of use by date marking.
- Comment was made that it would be beneficial for date marks to be located consistently on products for the benefit of consumers.
- How much is too much? What is the critical information required to be on a label and what could be included on an attachment such as a swing tag.

## **PART 5: ADMINISTERING AND ENFORCING FOOD LABELLING STANDARDS**

### Comments from attendees included:

- As reflected earlier, other public health enforcement priorities will see labelling move down the list of priorities.
- The NT does not have a large manufacturing base so often (80%) complaints received are referred interstate to the home jurisdiction.
- Re a national enforcement agency – view expressed that this favoured large manufacturers.
- Dealing with small and micro business, difficult for businesses to understand what is required – and EHOs not well equipped to advise them. Some issues in developing nutrition information panels. Acknowledged FSANZ NIP calculator but this can prove difficult to use.
- Comment as to how the food labelling review will consider the COAG development regarding the centralised interpretive advice agency.
- Restaurant level labelling for country of origin of seafood came into existence through lobbying by industry.
- Issue of NZ having classified food as dietary supplements which are then imported into Australia where there is no equivalent (eg caffeinated energy drinks)

## **GENERAL COMMENTS:**

### Participants made the following additional general comments:

- It is necessary and desirable to protect Australian producers and allow consumers access to information that allows them to purchase accordingly.

## List of Attendees

<b>First Name</b>	<b>Surname</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Adam	Body	Ardatek
Tracy	Ward	NT Dept Health and Families
Joshua	Cufley	NT Dept Health and Families
Josh	Heath	NT Dept Health and Families
Vivienne	Hobson	NT Dept Health and Families
Anthea	Oorloff	NT Dept Health and Families
Natalie	Rowe	NT Dept Health and Families
Carrie	Turner	NT Dept Health and Families
Yvonne	Tann	NT Dept Health and Families
Michael	Bethune	NT Dept Health and Families