



29 April 2009

Dear Health Minister,

Re: The Standard on Nutrition, Health and Related Claims and the Review of Food Labelling Laws and Policy

We write to seek your urgent support on two matters that will be considered by the Australia New Zealand Food Regulation Ministerial Council (the Ministerial Council) when it meets in Sydney on Friday 1 May 2009.

Standard on Nutrition Health and Related Claims

CHOICE urges the Ministerial Council to reverse its previous decision to delay finalisation of the Standard on Nutrition, Health and Related Claims (the health claims standard) until the completion of the Review of Food Labelling Laws and Policy (the Labelling Review). We are aware that the Ministerial Council has decided to proceed with the development of policy guidelines on front of pack labelling, separate to the Labelling Review, and believe that finalisation of the health claims standard should also proceed in isolation from the Labelling Review.

The health claims standard has been under development since 1993 and is now in the final stages of completion. After 16 years of development, CHOICE is confident that the standard has received sufficient scrutiny and the resulting standard will allow food manufacturers to highlight the supposed health benefits of their products while ensuring consumers and their health are not harmed by products making unsubstantiated and misleading health claims.

A further delay in introducing this standard is unwarranted and risks undermining 16 years of effort, leaving consumers without effective regulation that will protect them from the potentially misleading and unsubstantiated health claims that have proliferated in the market place in recent years. We urge you to proceed with the immediate finalisation of this vital food standard.

The Review of Food Labelling Laws and Policy

CHOICE also urges Ministers to ensure that the terms of reference for the Labelling Review include not only the protection of public health but the second and third objectives of food regulation outlined in Section 18 of the *Food Standards Australia New Zealand Act 1991*, relating to consumer information and misleading conduct. Food labelling laws and

57 Carrington Road Marrickville NSW 2204

Phone 02 9577 3333 Fax 02 9577 3377 Email ausconsumer@choice.com.au www.choice.com.au

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policies are vital in achieving all three primary objectives of food regulation. Any move to weaken the level of government oversight of food labelling or indeed the primary objectives of food regulation relating to consumer protection will significantly damage consumer confidence in the food supply, the independence of Australia's food regulatory system and its commitment to protecting the interests and health of Australian consumers.

CHOICE will continue to advocate for a food regulatory system that has the health and interests of consumers as its priority. We look forward to finalising the standard on Nutrition, Health and Related Claims, and participating in the Review of Food Labelling Laws and Policy and the development of policy guidelines on front of pack labelling.

Should you wish to discuss further any of the issues raised in this letter, please do not hesitate to contact CHOICE's senior food policy officer Clare Hughes on (02) 9577 3375 or at chughes@choice.com.au.

Yours sincerely,



Gordon Renouf
Director, Policy and Campaigns