



MEDIA RELEASE

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UNITED CALL FOR TRAFFIC LIGHTS DEFIES INDUSTRY OBJECTIONS

Australia's leading public health, medical and consumer groups urge governments to put consumers first and green light traffic light labelling

Australia's leading public health, medical and consumer organisations have co-signed a letter urging governments to adopt a front of pack food labelling scheme that is in the best interests of the Australian people, and not be swayed by industry bodies whose primary interest is the pursuit of profits.

In January this year former Federal Health Minister, Dr Neal Blewett, presented governments with the findings of an independent review of food labelling in Australia which recommended a traffic light system of labelling on the front of packaged food.

"The expert panel assessed all relevant evidence and concluded traffic light labelling was the best system to enable consumers, including those with poor literacy and numeracy skills, to assess and compare the nutritional value of foods and consequently, to make healthier choices," said Ingrid Just, spokesperson for the people's watchdog, CHOICE.

The introduction of traffic light labelling has been fiercely opposed by sections of the packaged food industry, most notably the Australian Food and Grocery Council. Presumably, the AFGC's reluctance to support traffic light labelling is because its clarity may undermine the effectiveness of frequently used marketing claims such as 'fat-free' on sugar-laden products.

"That said, not all food manufacturers and AFGC members are against traffic light labelling. Sanitarium, one of Australia's biggest food companies, has developed a similar system based on its own research that found colour-coded systems were most effective at informing consumer choice. This shows that public health agencies, consumers and industry can work together to deliver a fair and practical system of food labelling," said Ms Just.

The Food Regulation Ministerial Council, which comprises state health ministers and is chaired by Federal MP Catherine King, the Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing, is due to respond to recommendations in Blewett's Labelling Logic report by the end of the year.

"We are at a crucial point in time for food labelling here in Australia. The major players in public health are in favour of traffic light labelling on packaged food – a system that also has the backing of an independent panel of experts, as well as overwhelming public support," said CEO of the Public Health Association of Australia, Michael Moore.



“Now is the time for Governments to stand strong in the face of intense lobbying by industry and resist calls to reject the recommendations of experts in favour of an industry backed labelling scheme that has already been discredited by the independent review panel.”

Leading nutritionist Rosemary Stanton agrees industry’s attempts to push their own scheme - the percentage Daily Intake Guide (%DIG) - should be taken with more than the recommended daily amount of salt:

“The expert panel dismissed the %DIG on the grounds it is confusing, inconsistent and does not provide ‘at-a-glance’ information. Consumers are not alone in finding it hard to understand - I’ve been a nutritionist for over 40 years and, frankly, it is complex and confusing. How can anyone be expected to add up the percentage of a range of nutrients and kilojoules in everything they eat? If consumers need that detailed information – it’s already on the back of the pack. The front of the pack is for a quick signal about key ingredients known to be important for health.”

-ENDS-

Signatories to the letter sent to the Ministerial Council responsible for labelling law and policy, include:

- Public Health Association of Australia
- Australian Medical Association
- CHOICE
- Diabetes Australia
- Cancer Council Australia
- Obesity Policy Coalition
- The Australian New Zealand Obesity Society
- Nutritionist Rosemary Stanton OAM
- Diabetes Australia-Victoria
- Cancer Council Victoria
- The World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for Obesity at Deakin University
- VicHealth
- The George Institute for Global Health

Media Spokespeople:

Dr Rosemary Stanton OAM (Nutritionist) 02 4465 1711

Ingrid Just (Spokesperson, CHOICE) 0430 172 669

Michael Moore (CEO, Public Health Association) 02 6285 2373/ 0417 249 731