

Say “No” to Junk Food exemption in ETS Scheme

Calls to exclude processed food from the Australian Emission Trading Scheme (ETS) will cost Australians their health, tax dollars and the environment.

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) calls on the Federal Government to resist calls to exempt processed food (which includes junk foods) in the Australian Emissions Trading Scheme. CEO of the PHAA Michael Moore said “governments should have a long term vision of a sustainable, equitable and healthy food supply. Inclusion of processed foods in the ETS is a critical activity to help structure the food supply towards this goal”.

Leading nutritionist, Dr Rosemary Stanton said, “the average supermarket stocks 1800 different snack food lines, more than 150 breakfast cereals (some more accurately described as confectionery), and an absurd choice of junk in aisles stocked with packet soups, sauces, biscuits and sugary drinks. This vast array of foods ensures we over-eat”.

Food processing currently is included in the Federal Government’s Emission Trading Scheme (ETS) which aims to identify the relatively high carbon footprint of such processing within the government’s strategy to transition to a lower carbon economy. The PHAA challenges the idea put up by the Australian Food and Grocery Council (AFGC) which has successfully lobbied the Federal Opposition to exclude food processors from the ETS as one of its proposed amendments to the scheme. Mr Moore said, “the government must resist such proposals because of the impact such an exemption will have on human health, the economy and the environment”.

The AFGC claims that they represent the “nation’s producers of consumer food, drink and grocery products”. It should be noted, however, that their member companies predominantly produce packaged food and beverages that are not essential for a healthy diet. Many of the processed foods are high in fat, sugar and/or salt and many fit the usual definition of junk foods and drinks. As well as the health risks associated with high consumption of these foods, the excessive processing associated with their production has a detrimental environmental impact in terms of energy and water inputs and carbon outputs.

The food industry aims to ‘value-add’ to basic food products to make them more attractive, usually by minimising the content of ‘real’ food and adding ‘padding’ from ingredients such as sugar, fats and salt. The top five individual processed food categories that contribute to value adding in the Australian food industry are meat processing (\$1.97 billion), beer and malt (\$1.5 billion), confectionery (\$1.5 billion), wine (\$1.5), and soft drinks, cordial and syrups (\$1.5) (*Australian Food Statistics 2008, Dept Agriculture, Food and Forestry*). The government must also ensure no exemptions for alcohol.

Dr Stanton argued “the consequence of consuming diets that are high in these foods is of significant concern to health, nutrition and environmental health experts. Governments need to note dramatically increasing health care costs related to increasing diet-related problems such as obesity, hypertension, type 2 diabetes, kidney disease and osteoarthritis and to ensure that every action they take reduces risk associated with the causes of chronic disease.”

“There are many good reasons for the Federal Government to continue to include processed foods and alcohol in the Emission Trading Scheme. Including processed foods and beverages in the ETS encourages those producing such foods to act responsibly and consider the consequences of their actions in terms of both health and the environmental impact,” Mr Moore added.

For further information/comment:

Michael Moore,	CEO, Public Health Association of Australia	0417 249 731
Dr Rosemary Stanton	Food and Nutrition Group, PHAA	02 4465 1711 0411 585 711