

PUBLIC HEALTH AND CONSUMER ORGANISATIONS CALL FOR FOOD REGULATORY REFORM TO PUT THE HEALTH OF AUSTRALIANS AND NEW ZEALANDERS FIRST

Public health and consumer organisations are calling for the Australian Government to prioritise the health of Australians and New Zealanders as they consider reforms to our food regulatory system.

Right now, the Australian Government is redesigning our food regulatory system for Australia and New Zealand. This will set the foundation for how food is made, sold and marketed long into the future.

Public health must be front and centre to ensure the system is equipped to effectively prevent diet-related disease, protect the health of the community, and promote a resilient population to support economic growth, now and into the future. Aspirations for the food regulatory system drafted by the state/territory, Australian and New Zealand governments outline their commitment to protect public health, but the proposed reforms fail to enable this.

The draft Regulatory Impact Statement of the Review of the *Food Standards Australia New Zealand Act 1991*, which outlines proposed reforms, fails to consider key concerns raised by public health and consumer organisations. As a result, it prioritises the profits of the food industry at the expense of our health – such as by allowing processed food companies to use new food additives and ingredients without approval and with less oversight. The changes will also make it more difficult to implement measures to protect the public's health, including changes to give consumers more accurate information about the food they are buying.

The proposed reforms are set to shift the role of Food Standards Australia and New Zealand and change decision making and enforcement processes, compromising the agency's independence and undermining the integrity and strength of the current joint system that relies on input from all Australian governments and New Zealand.

Poor diet is a leading cause of preventable disease and dietary patterns are driven by what the food industry makes available, accessible, and appealing to consumers. Government inaction on creating healthy food environments already leads to diet-related diseases like type-2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, kidney disease and many cancers.

This is by far the most significant public health issue linked to our food system today, but the proposed changes fail to consider this a high priority. If implemented, these reforms will be a significant backwards step in public health protection for Australians and New Zealanders.

Our food regulatory system requires reform, but this must be done in a way that better protects long-term public health. The FSANZ Act review must be refocused to put public health first. This must include an independent review to fully assess the impact on long-term public health of all proposals, including the health and economic costs and benefits to consumers and governments. The draft RIS must be amended to incorporate the findings of this independent review and discuss additional reforms to address long-term public health.

The FSANZ Act must also align with the Aspirations for the Food Regulatory System. Key reforms must include:

- Clearly defining public health to encompass both short and long-term health, including the prevention of diet-related disease.
- Developing a pathway for public health and consumer representatives to ask for review and amendment of the Food Standards Code.
- Resourcing FSANZ to set strategic priorities that aim to promote healthy food choices, improve diets and prevent diet-related disease.
- Setting statutory maximum timeframes for public health proposals that are aligned with timeframes for industry applications, to ensure public health measures receive at least equal priority to industry applications.

PUBLIC HEALTH AND CONSUMER ORGANISATIONS CALL FOR FOOD REGULATORY REFORM TO PUT THE HEALTH OF AUSTRALIANS AND NEW ZEALANDERS FIRST



AUSTRALIAN CHRONIC DISEASE PREVENTION ALLIANCE

