

Food Ministers protect public health and support food safety

The tenth meeting of the Australia and New Zealand Food Regulation Ministerial Council was held in Brisbane in May. Issues discussed included:

Trans fatty acids in the New Zealand and Australian food supply

The Ministerial Council considered a report on Trans Fatty Acids in the New Zealand and Australian Food Supply prepared by Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ).

Ministers noted that the contributions of trans fatty acids to energy intakes of Australians and New Zealanders was below the goal of 1% proposed by the World Health Organisation, and comparable to or lower than intake estimates from some countries overseas.

Ministers noted the findings of the Review that immediate regulatory intervention is not required and that non-regulatory measures to further reducing the levels of trans fatty acids in the Australian and New Zealand food supply would be the most appropriate action.

The report recommended that a review would commence in early 2009 of the outcome of non regulatory measures to reduce trans fatty acids in the food supply. Ministers noted that regular updates on progress on trans fat reduction would be provided on the work being carried out by the Australia New Zealand Collaboration on Trans Fats and agreed to consider regulatory action should sufficient progress not be made. Ministers agreed to endorse the review report on trans fatty acids, which is available from www.foodstandards.gov.au.

National Food Incident Response Protocol

The Ministerial Council endorsed a National Food Incident Response Protocol. The Protocol will provide a framework for the regulatory system to respond

to national food incidents in a timely, appropriate, consistent and coordinated matter. The Protocol formalises existing arrangements between the Australian States and Territories and links to the system for responding to communicable disease outbreaks including foodborne illness. The Protocol will be reviewed by the Implementation Sub Committee of the Food Regulation Standing Committee (FRSC) on an ongoing basis to incorporate feedback received on the use of the Protocol in actual food incidents. The Protocol will be formally reviewed every three years.

Mandatory fortification with folic acid and iodine

FSANZ provided the Ministerial Council with a progress report on its work in relation to mandatory fortification with folic acid and iodine. In relation to mandatory fortification with folic acid, the Board of FSANZ was to make its decision on the first review report at a meeting in May 2007. Ministers agreed to meet by mid June 2007 to consider FSANZ's recommendation resulting from the review and make a final decision. In relation to mandatory fortification with iodine, the Board of FSANZ will finalise its Assessment Report and provide it to the Ministerial Council in July 2007. The Ministerial Council will then have 60 days from the date of notification to decide if it will seek a review.

Front of pack labelling of food

The Ministerial Council has agreed to the process, timeline and terms of reference for consideration of an appropriate front-of-pack labelling system for Australia and New Zealand. Ministers noted that the chair of the FRSC Front of Pack Labelling Working Group has written to a number of food industry, consumer and public health stakeholders to inform them of the work being undertaken, and to invite them to provide information and/or research that will contribute to the initial phase of this work. FRSC expects to report to the Ministerial Council in October 2007. □