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## 87% of Australians support traffic light labelling

**OPC urges government to put health before industry interests when review is presented tomorrow**



A leading coalition of health groups, the Obesity Policy Coalition, has appealed to the Food Labelling Review panel to prioritise public health when it presents its final report to the Food Standards Ministerial Council tomorrow (3 December 2010).

Jane Martin, senior policy adviser for the Obesity Policy Coalition said a survey<sup>1</sup> of the 449 submissions to the national labelling review revealed strong industry push-back against front of pack traffic light labelling, despite keen support for this type of labelling from health groups due to the growing body of evidence of its effectiveness in changing consumer behaviour.

Traffic light labelling involves representing levels of fat, sugar and salt in items using red, amber and green symbols on the front of the pack, helping consumers to recognise at a glance what is in the product.

In Europe, the food industry has reportedly spent over €1 billion in lobbying to oppose the introduction of traffic light labelling on the front of packs in the European Union, and to date they have been successful. "This represents an unacceptable level of influence of commercial interests in the development of public policy," said Ms Martin. "Australian politicians need to resist lobbying by the food industry which undermines the public interest," she said.

In Australia and New Zealand, 77 % of the food industry submissions to the Food Labelling Review panel opposed traffic light labelling. Such a scheme would put red lights on many highly processed products that are marketed as healthier options but in reality are high in saturated fat, sugar or salt.

"However, traffic light labelling was supported by the majority of health organisations and state and territory governments' submissions as being a good approach to front of pack nutrition labelling. And it's easy to understand why: empowering consumers with information that they can interpret at a glance is proven to support people in making healthier choices," said Ms Martin.

New Cancer Council Victoria research indicates that 87% of Australian consumers are also in favour of traffic light labelling on food packaging. This new research also shows that almost one-third of consumers that pay attention to nutritional information on products base their food purchasing decisions on saturated fat content.

Ms Martin warned the alternative touted by the majority of food industry submissions, the percent daily intake scheme (where consumers must keep note of their nutrient intake during the day and add it up) was not well understood by

<sup>1</sup> White J, Thomson G, Signal L, *Front of Pack Nutrition Labelling: where to now?*, *New Zealand Medical Journal*, 15 October 2010, Vol 123 No. 1324.

Media release



consumers and in fact helped to conceal high levels of sugar and fat in products. No submissions from health organisations supported the percent daily intake scheme.

“People want to know what they’re eating and they should have the right to clear and concise information about the nutrients they’re consuming. Considering the burgeoning rates of obesity, the Government should not reject traffic light labelling under pressure of the food industry. It must heed the calls from health bodies and more importantly provide the nutrition information to consumers that they urgently want and need,” Ms Martin said.



#### **About the Cancer Council Victoria public opinion survey**

A random sample of 1,521 adults who were the main grocery buyer, residing in private households in metropolitan and regional areas across all Australian States and Territories were surveyed in 2010.

#### **About the Obesity Policy Coalition**

The Obesity Policy Coalition is a group of leading public health agencies who are concerned about the escalating levels of overweight and obesity, particularly in children.

The Obesity Policy Coalition partners include Diabetes Australia - Vic, Cancer Council Victoria, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) and the World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for Obesity Prevention at Deakin University.

# Media release

