

TRAFFIC LIGHT LABELLING FOR FOOD

THE
GREENS



The Greens will introduce legislation for a 'traffic light' front-of-pack food labelling system on all food and beverage products sold in Australia to assist consumers in selecting healthier food products. This labelling system will allow consumers to easily identify healthier food products and quickly make comparisons between products. The traffic light labelling system would replace all other systems in operation for ease of simplicity.

Obesity is a significant and growing problem in Australia. The National Preventive Health Taskforce estimates that on current trends nearly 17 million Australians will be overweight or obese by 2025. If current obesity trends continue, the life expectancy for children alive now will fall two years by the time they are 20 years old. This would represent a loss of five to ten years in current life expectancy gains. The social and economic costs of obesity have been estimated in 2008 to be \$58.2 billion.¹

Ensuring Australians have sound, clear and accessible nutritional information when making their food and beverage choice is a key component to addressing the obesity epidemic. In Australia it is mandatory to provide nutrition information in the form of information panels on food packages. However, according to the Australian Consumers' Association², research has shown that consumers find this information confusing and difficult to interpret. Traffic Light labelling provides a simple front-of-pack food system which would address this problem. It would show total fat, saturated fat, sugar and sodium content ranked and colour coded as either high (red), medium (amber) or low (green), based on nutrient points.

International experience shows that the Traffic Light labelling system is both popular and effective. Research in the UK has found that consumers' ability to correctly use and interpret front-of-pack food labelling information to identify healthy food products was significantly better using the Traffic Light labelling system compared with other front-of-pack labelling systems.³ In Australia, research into consumers' preferences for front-of-pack labelling systems conducted by the Cancer Council, Choice, Obesity Policy Coalition, Institute of Obesity, Nutrition and Exercise, and Public Health Advocacy Institute of Western Australia indicates strong consumer support for nutrition information to be included on the front of food packages.⁴

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The Greens will:

- Introduce legislation for Traffic Light labelling that will include symbols and coloured schema to provide at-a-glance interpretation of nutrient information:
 - Nutrient information will focus on saturated fat, sugar, total fat and sodium as these are the items of greatest importance to consumers.
 - There will be two sets of nutrition criteria, one for food products and one for beverages.
 - Include the absolute number of grams of fat, saturated fat, sugars and sodium on the front-of-pack label.
 - Information on levels of key nutrients will be based on 100g or 100mL of the food or beverage product.
- Conduct a public information campaign to accompany the implementation of the Traffic Light labelling system to educate consumers in how to use it to make healthy choices.

1 Access Economics. The growing economic cost of obesity in 2008: three years on. Canberra: Diabetes Australia, 2008. <http://www.accesseconomics.com.au/publicationsreports/showreport.php?id=172> (accessed Jul 2009).

2 Feunekes GI, Gortemaker IA, Willems AA, et al. Front-of-pack nutrition labelling: testing effectiveness of different nutrition labelling formats front-of-pack in four European countries. *Appetite* 2008; 50: 57-70

3 Conquest Research. Food labelling study prepared for Which? United Kingdom; 2006.

4 Kelly B, Hughes C, Chapman K, Louie J, Dixon H, King L On behalf of a Collaboration of Public Health and Consumer Research Groups. Front-of-Pack Food Labelling: Traffic Light Labelling Gets the Green Light. Cancer Council: Sydney 2008