



Cereals targeted in war on weight

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SUGAR-RICH breakfast cereals such as Kellogg's Nutri-Grain are junk food in disguise and should attract GST to help stem the epidemic of childhood obesity.

A new anti-obesity lobby group made the claim yesterday as it called for a simple traffic-light system of red, yellow and green on the front of product labels to indicate fat, sugar and salt levels of all food and drinks.

The Obesity Policy Coalition, launched in Melbourne to pressure political parties before the upcoming federal election, also called for a ban on junk food advertising targeting children across all media, including the internet.

One in four Australian children is overweight or obese, and it is predicted 60 per cent will be within 30 years. Diabetes rates are also increasing rapidly.

OPC policy adviser Jane Martin said effective government intervention was crucial. The federal Government was effectively subsidising high-sugar cereals by letting them slip through the tax system exempt from GST. "Some cereals being marketed are up to 40 per cent sugar, which in reality is no different to the levels of sugar in some confectionery products and chocolate biscuits," she said.

"We think they should attract GST in a similar way as bakery products. Bread is exempt from GST but cakes and pastries attract GST."

OPC proposes that cereals with a sugar level of more than 27 per cent attract GST. These include five Kellogg's cereals — Nutri-Grain, Coco-Pops, Rice Bubbles, Just Right Original and Sultana Bran Crunch — as well as Lowan's Cocoa Bombs, Nestle's Milo Cereal, Sanitarium's Weet-Bix Crunch Honey, Uncle Toby's Plus Sultana Bran and Home Brand Cocoa Puffs.

The group also wants mandatory labelling for packaged food and beverages, using the traffic-light colours on the front of the container to indicate the levels of salt, sugar and saturated fat. High levels would be red, medium would be orange and low would be green.

The group, which draws together expertise from the Cancer Council Victoria, Diabetes Australia and the World Health Organisation, has already held preliminary talks with both main political parties.

Health Minister Tony Abbott welcomed input from the group, saying childhood obesity was "a very important issue", but made it clear he intended to leave product labelling to the market.

"The Government doesn't have plans to impose any new

taxes, and I encourage industry to continue prominent front-of-packet labelling of the energy content of food," he said yesterday.

Kellogg's head dietician Rebecca Boustead said she wondered where the group had got its evidence from when suggesting Kellogg's Nutri-Grain was junk food in disguise.

"All of our breakfast cereals are appropriate to include in a balanced diet," she said.

"They all contribute vitamins and minerals to people's diets and the majority are low in fat. We know that people who eat breakfast cereals have a better diet than those who do not."

Additional reporting:

Sarah Elks

SUGAR FIX

Proposal to impose GST on high-sugar breakfast cereals

Facing tax (27 per cent sugar or higher)

Kellogg's Nutri-Grain
Kellogg's Coco-Pops
Kellogg's Rice Bubbles
Kellogg's Just Right Original
Kellogg's Sultana Bran Crunch
Lowan Cocoa Bombs
Nestle Milo Cereal
Sanitarium Weet-Bix Crunch Honey
Uncle Toby's Plus Sultana Bran
Home Brand Cocoa Puffs

Source: Obesity Policy Coalition