



The processed food industry is in a state of apoplexy and it is using all its might to tackle these recommendations



DEMAND from public health experts, consumer groups and the public for a more helpful and transparent system of food labelling has the food industry seeing red.

The Obesity Policy Coalition, Diabetes Australia, the Australian Medical Association, the Cancer Council and consumer watchdog Choice are just a few of the high-profile organisations united in calling on state and federal governments to introduce traffic-light labelling on the front of packaged food.

Quite simply, the aim of traffic-light labelling is to give consumers clear information at a glance so they can make an informed decision.

A traffic-light scheme would use colours to indicate levels of fat, saturated fat, sugar and salt in products: red for high, amber for medium, green for low. It's not about telling people what to buy but giving them the tools to cut through marketing hype. State and federal

governments will soon respond to an independent review of food labelling law and policy led by former health minister, Dr Neal Blewett.

So why is the food industry trying to make it seem so controversial?

Clearly such strong consumer and expert support is concerning to those who turn a healthy profit from unhealthy food.

Traffic lights would make claims such as "fat-free" on sugar-laden products seem a little disingenuous.

Choice is running a campaign — Shame the Claim — encouraging consumers to nominate examples of unhealthy food hiding behind cleverly worded nutrition claims, and the online gallery is testament to how much industry relies on this marketing technique.

The high acceptance of traffic lights has the processed food industry in a state of apoplexy and it is using all its might to tackle these common-sense recommendations.

In Australia, the Australian Food and Grocery Council (AFGC)

has taken up the call, championing its alternative labelling system — the Daily Intake Guide — which research has shown to be confusing for consumers, and lobbying the Government to resist introduction of traffic lights.

Governments are due to respond to Dr Blewett's recommendations by the end of this year, so it's little wonder the industry is ramping up efforts to discredit such a scheme.

People shouldn't need to rely on a smartphone app for nutrition information — it should be available at a glance, for everyone, regardless of education.

And consumers should be able to trust what they see. That is why the Obesity Policy Coalition, Choice and many other public health groups are calling on governments to give the green light to traffic lights as a sensible labelling system for the benefit of all Australians.

Jane Martin is senior policy adviser, Obesity Policy Coalition

back



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THERE are many reasons Australia's \$108 billion food and grocery manufacturing sector sees red over traffic-light front-of-pack food labelling.

First, using red, amber and green traffic lights on food labels based on grams/100g of sugar, fat, saturated fat and sodium in products — advocated by some public health activists — is confusing, overly simplistic and sends the wrong message to consumers about making healthy choices.

For example, using traffic lights, a bottle of full-sugar cola soft drink scores three green lights (saturated fat, fat and salt) and one red light for sugar, while a bottle of milk gets three ambers (fat, saturated fat and sugar) and one green light for salt. Using traffic lights, the soft drink appears to be a healthier option, which of course is wrong.

Consumers also interpret traffic lights on food the same way as when they're driving on the road, where red means "stop" and green means "go". Neither of these assumptions is correct for food. Green does not mean eat as much as you like and red does not mean eat none.

It's a major concern when a red light would be



interpreted as "don't eat" certain healthy foods such as dairy. Traffic lights assign red lights for most dairy products, yet everyone agrees that dairy is an essential part of a healthy, balanced diet.

This is not an appropriate public health outcome, especially when some Australians, such as teenage girls and boys, need to consume more dairy to boost their calcium intake. Currently 84 per cent of 14 to 16-year-old girls are getting less calcium than they need at a time when bones are often growing rapidly.

No government around the world has supported traffic-light labelling as its preferred front-of-pack food labelling system.

Traffic-light labels have been extensively investigated but have been rejected by many countries.

After significant debate, the EU Parliament recommended %DI as its preferred system.

This is a similar approach to the Daily Intake Guide (DIG) front-of-pack label system on more than 4000 food products in Australia. DIG labels outline the amount of energy, fat, saturated fat, sugar and salt in a standard portion of the food and how that translates to average daily intake.

AFGC recently released an externally researched paper, concluding that there is no research worldwide to show that traffic-light labelling is better than DIG in reducing obesity.

The independent research, by leading nutritionist Susannah Tymms, was sent to relevant federal, state and territory MPs following the release of the Blewett Labelling Review, which recommended multiple traffic-light labels.

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