

FOOD STANDARDS NEWS



The Newsletter of the Australia New Zealand Food Authority

March/April 2002



FROM THE
MANAGING
DIRECTOR'S
DESK

I have just returned from a meeting of the ANZFA Board in Wellington where we also took the opportunity to meet with our New Zealand stakeholders, including the Maori Reference Group, the Food Forum and the Officials' Committee on Food Administration. This Board meeting progressed some major issues facing ANZFA during 2002. These include reviewing the regulation of nutrition claims where public submissions to date raise concerns over the use of misleading claims under the current code of practice.

Infant formula

ANZFA has spent a long time finalising its review of the infant formula standard to bring it up to date with the latest scientific knowledge on infants' nutrition needs. We believe that the proposed new standard that has been recommended to the Ministerial Council is a step in the right direction and it is a considerable improvement on the previous outdated standard. We also recognise that this is a constantly evolving area of food science and technology and that the new infant formula standard may also have to be brought up to date with emerging scientific knowledge in the future.

New food labelling

We have just completed some qualitative research on food labelling which shows that consumers both appreciate and use the wide range of information on food labels. However, the research also indicates that consumers want to learn more about exactly what labels mean. Our food labelling poster has been widely distributed to supermarkets, health professionals and family doctors. During the course of this year, we will be continuing our good working links with businesses and health professionals and organisations to help consumers understand how to use food label information to make healthy choices.

We have been pleased at the interest of many schools and some school systems in covering this issue in their life skills curricula. We hope to build on this in 2002. While school children

continued over »



Review of criteria and conditions for making nutrition content claims

ANZFA has released for comment its Draft Assessment of the criteria and conditions for making nutrition content and related claims (second round of consultation).

Nutrition content claims are simple, highly visible messages such as 'low fat', 'high fibre' and 'lite' which are used by manufacturers to alert shoppers to the nutritional properties of a specific food product. Although some would argue these claims are only a marketing tool, they can play a major role in assisting consumers in making healthy, informed food choices by providing a quick and easy reference point. This is particularly important when you consider that diet-related diseases (such as cardiovascular disease, some cancers, diabetes mellitus and obesity) are a major cause of illness and death in Australia and New Zealand. Consumers can use these claims to 'translate' nutrition information to help select and plan healthier foods and meals which may in turn have a positive impact on their health status. Health professionals and responsible manufacturers can also use nutrition claims as a dietary education tool, to assist those consumers who have an interest

in nutrition or special dietary requirements but find it difficult to understand the nutrition information panel on food packages. For many shoppers, the label is often the first and sometimes the only source of information about the nutritional content of the food which is why it is important for ANZFA to make sure that the claims being made are easy to understand, credible and not misleading.

We released an Issues Paper (Initial Assessment) in May 2001 to commence the first round of public consultation. The objectives were to determine the most appropriate regulatory measure for managing these claims and to review the criteria that should apply to each claim. We canvassed six possible regulatory options ranging from minimal government involvement (self-regulation) and reliance on fair trading law, through to full regulation.

A majority of the submissions received clearly indicated that either full or co-regulation are the preferred approach to managing these claims. This was supported by an independent

continued over »

« Review of criteria and conditions for making nutrition content claims cont...

cost-benefit analysis conducted by the Allen Consulting Group who ranked co-regulation as the most feasible option. We now propose to define nutrition content claims and criteria in Standard 1.2.8 of the new joint Food Standards Code. We are also exploring the possibility of introducing a co-regulatory management framework to regulate health, nutrition and related claims. This approach is being reviewed under a separate proposal (P250). The P250 initial assessment report will be released after the Ministerial Council meeting in May 2002, at which it is expected that the Food Regulation Standing Committee will present its recommended policy framework for health, nutrition and related claims for a decision by Ministers.

There are a number of advantages in listing nutrition content claims in Standard 1.2.8 including harmonisation of claims and criteria between Australia and New Zealand, regulation of claims for imported products, consistency with fair trading laws and increased consumer confidence in claims.

The proposed amendments to Standard 1.2.8 include:

- defined criteria and conditions for a list of specific nutrition content claims;
- definitions for reference food and comparative nutrition claims;
- a prohibition of 'free claims' to ensure consistency with fair trading laws;
- a prohibition of 'cholesterol claims' given consumer confusion and the greater emphasis on reducing saturated fat intake rather than dietary cholesterol; and
- declarations in conjunction with 'no added salt' and 'no added sugar' or 'unsweetened' claims to alert consumers to the actual salt/sugar content of the food.

We propose to retain the existing provisions in Standard 1.2.8 for sodium/salt, gluten, lactose, low joule, omega and mono and polyunsaturated fatty acid claims without significant amendment.

You can find the P234 Draft Assessment on ANZFA's website at www.anzfa.gov.au and www.anzfa.govt.nz. The closing date for submissions is Friday 10 May 2002.

For further information on either report contact the Project Manager, Catherine Deeps, Nutrition and Labelling Program on (02) 6271 2686 or email catherine.deeps@anzfa.gov.au

Vietnamese visitors



ANZFA's Regional Projects Program, in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO), hosted a visit of six officials from the Vietnamese Ministry of Health. The officials met with ANZFA staff to discuss the implementation of food safety systems and the development of legislation. The visitors also met with AQIS, ACT Health and the TGA before travelling to Melbourne for a demonstration of Oz Food Net. The Vietnamese visitors are pictured with ANZFA's Managing Director, Ian Lindenmayer.

« From the MD's desk cont...

are not the principal decision makers in food purchasing, they will take on that role when they leave home and, in the meanwhile, they are well placed to pass on to their parents an awareness of healthy eating and how to use food labels to achieve that objective.

With growing alarm over the sustained increase in obesity and other diet-related disease in our community, it makes good sense to give our kids the skills to make smart choices about what they eat.

I have had recent contact with industry groups in both Australia and New Zealand expressing concern that some companies may not be able to meet the proposed December 2002 deadline for the new labelling requirements for all of their product lines. I continue to emphasise that two years was provided to make these changes and that was preceded by six years' consultation on proposed changes. There is a wide range of material on the ANZFA website to assist industry with the requirements of the Joint Code.

It is important that all food manufacturers, importers and packagers that have not acted on this over the past 15 months, lift it to the top of their priority list now. The capacity of the label design; and packaging sectors is substantial but not unlimited. Food suppliers which don't give this issue high priority now will face the prospect that they will not meet the deadline and will be producing non-compliant products which cannot legally be sold.

GM Food

I recently expressed disappointment at attempts by some anti-GM lobby groups to spread misinformation about the safety and labelling of genetically modified (GM) foods. This followed a few anti-GM lobbyists whipping up public anxiety over the safety of GM foods in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

We carry no brief for or against any form of technology. Our views are formed solely on what the evidence and scientific scrutiny reveals.

I can understand people wanting to avoid GM foods for environmental, ethical, religious or other reasons, but they should argue their case on these bases and not mislead the consuming public with unsubstantiated assertions. I don't pretend that we have all the answers about GM foods, but we have enough to know that those we approve are at least as safe as their non-GM counterparts and have been in the world's food supply for more than a decade - without a single scientifically-documented case of causing harm to a person.

The ANZFA safety assessment process is more demanding than for any other class of food. It is intended to ensure that the genetic modification in approved GM foods is stable over several generations and that the toxicity and allergenicity of these foods is at levels no higher than in conventionally grown crops.

ANZFA welcomes vigorous public debate on any food matter. But the continual sledging of GM food safety has gone beyond the bounds of ethical lobbying practice. I now believe that

these groups should be asked to put up or shut up. We have the evidence that approved GM foods are safe to eat. Where is their evidence that they are not?

Food regulation can only be objective if it is based on high-quality science and ANZFA's general approach on the safety assessment for GM foods has been supported by some of the most credible organisations in the world including the Royal Society in Britain.

New format for ANZFA reports

You will notice from the material recently out for public comment that our reports are now in the new format and have the simpler titles of initial, draft and final assessment report. The round of public comment will occur after the initial assessment report and after the draft assessment report.

Food Standards News goes electronic

Finally, as this year is going to be one of rapid change, I encourage readers to subscribe to our new Food Standards Update service. We have been aware for some time that, by the time it has been printed and mailed out, the information in Food Standards News may be weeks out of date when it reaches your desk. The new email service will give you instant access not only to Food Standards News each month but also to the Food Standards Update email service of any media release, fact sheet, recall information or other news we may issue between editions. You can find details about this free subscription service in this edition. Please switch to it if you can.

Ian Lindenmayer
Managing Director

Do you use food labels? Consumer survey on labelling issues

As part of its Evaluation Strategy, ANZFA recently commissioned a market research company, NFO Donovan Research, to undertake qualitative research on labelling issues. The final report for the first stage of the research project, research with consumers in Australia and New Zealand about labelling issues is now available on the website www.anzfa.gov.au/media.

This research indicated that consumers generally had a good appreciation of the range of information that is available on packaged foods. Their use of this information was primarily to assist in determining product choice while shopping and to learn more about the product and to seek reassurance that it was a 'safe choice'.

The level of knowledge and understanding about different label components varied a great deal. For example date marking and ingredient lists were recognised, understood and used regularly whereas there was some misunderstanding and confusion about Nutrition Information Panels (NIPs) and country of origin labelling. Discussion about labelling for irradiated, novel or genetically modified foods or food ingredients indicated these issues are very emotive yet there is a great deal of misunderstanding and misinformation about the use of these food ingredients in our food supply. The perceived usefulness and importance of the different label components also varied with the food category: for example for dairy products, date marking was seen as the most important piece of information, whilst for breakfast cereals it was the ingredient list and for frozen sweets and savoury foods the NIP was considered to be the most important.

The ANZFA research project on labelling issues is exciting in that, for the first time, the research project covers a variety of stakeholder groups, such as consumers, the food industry, health professionals and government enforcement officers and should provide a set of different perspectives on labelling issues. The project is divided into several stages: the first and second stages use qualitative research methods, such as focus groups, to gain an insight into people's opinions on labelling issues. For the first stage of the project with consumers this included research on what particular information on the food label is important to them and why. The second stage will explore the views of other stakeholders, for example, the people producing food labels (the food industry), those health professionals using the information on food labels to advise clients on food choices (for example GPs, dietitians) and those checking to see if the labelling laws are

being adhered to (enforcement officers).

From this preliminary information, the next stage is to develop a quantitative survey of consumers on labelling issues that will provide statistics for the Australian and New Zealand populations and different population sub-groups on the extent to which people are aware of food labels, their extent of knowledge and understanding of the different types information they contain and how that affects their behaviour when choosing food.

While the qualitative findings from the first stage of research with consumers provide a significant amount of information and understanding, they are not representative of the views of all Australians or New Zealanders and the results cannot be extrapolated to the wide community. The qualitative research does, however, provide essential background information for the design of an effective quantitative survey. The final stage of the labelling project will be to establish a food label tracking system that will monitor the use of different labelling provisions on labels in different food categories.

The research forms part of the ANZFA Evaluation Strategy which involves six projects that aim to collect data that will be used assess the impact on stakeholder groups of important changes to the Food Standards Code. In the first phase of the evaluation process baseline data are being collected for relevant regulatory changes, such as new labelling provisions, the new food additive standards and the new food safety standards. The results of the baseline survey on safe food handling practices was reported in the February edition of Food Standards News (a summary report and full report are now available on the ANZFA website www.anzfa.gov.au/mediareleasespublications).

New Food Safety Authority for New Zealand

The New Zealand Minister-designate for food safety, Annette King, has announced a plan to establish a New Zealand Food Safety Authority by July this year.

In announcing the plan for the new Authority, Ms King said that she welcomed this new challenge. While, in New Zealand, responsibility for food issues had traditionally been shared between the health and agriculture portfolios, Ms King said that food safety was clearly a prime health concern.

'The work I have been doing in the past two years, particularly in relation to food labelling, has reinforced my interest across the whole spectrum of food issues,' Ms King said.

'Establishment of the new Food Safety Authority represents good news for all New Zealanders. Its work will affect all our lives'.

Ms King said the authority's minister would be advised by a 10 - member advisory board that would assess the authority's performance.

'This board will include consumer representation, as well as producer representation. It is essential that consumers' interests in food safety are effectively addressed.

'Until the authority is established, the Minister of Agriculture and I will remain responsible for our respective parts of the food administration system, and I will be working closely with Jim Sutton and the Ministers of Finance and State Services on legislation and communication and funding issues during the transition period,' Ms King said.

Under the New Zealand treaty with Australia, ANZFA is responsible for developing standards for food labelling and composition for both New Zealand and Australia. The treaty, which governs the ANZFA relationship, specifically excludes food hygiene issues from the activities ANZFA undertakes for New Zealand and the food safety standards in the joint Food Standards Code do not, therefore, apply in New Zealand.

News In Brief

Food safety prosecutions

The first food safety prosecutions under the new food safety standards have occurred in Queensland. Brisbane City Council successfully prosecuted a Brisbane restaurant on 31/1/02 for numerous breaches of the food safety standards. In a defended action in the Magistrates Court, the business was fined \$9,000 plus costs of inspection, investigation and court costs.

Cairns City Council has successfully prosecuted, in the Cairns Magistrates Court, a restaurant proprietor for 12 breaches of the Food Safety Standards. The proprietor was fined \$5000 (plus \$612 costs) on 18 February

2001 with the following mitigating circumstances taken into account, that it was a first offence, the business closed for 5 weeks and approximately \$80,000 was spent on renovations.

The change to Food Standards Australia New Zealand

Revisions to the Treaty between Australia and New Zealand are expected to be completed before July 2002, not March as stated in Food Standards News 34. We still expect the change to Food Standards Australia New Zealand will take place mid 2002. You can read the latest information on our website <http://www.anzfa.gov.au/mediareleasespublications/factsheets/factsheets2002/thechangeofoodstand1346.cfm>

Pregnant women and listeria risk (Australia only)

ANZFA has re-issued advice to pregnant women about the risk of contracting the food poisoning bacteria listeria. This follows the confirmed deaths from listeria infection of two unborn babies in Western Australia.

The Chief Scientist for the Australia New Zealand Food Authority, Dr Marion Healy, said that pregnant women need to know about the dangers of the foodborne bacteria *Listeria monocytogenes* and the steps they can take to prevent infection of their unborn or newly born baby.

“First and foremost, it’s vital that all pregnant women know about the listeria bacteria, and how they can protect the life and health of their unborn baby by avoiding certain foods,” Dr Healy said.

“Listeria rarely causes illness in healthy people, but it can cause serious illness in the elderly or people with poor immune systems, and it can cause women to have miscarriages or stillbirths. Listeria infection can make a newborn baby very ill.

“Listeria isn’t a new bacteria but it’s only over the last ten years that it’s been widely recognised that listeria is transmitted through contaminated food. Listeria is destroyed by cooking but unlike other bacteria it will grow in

some food that is refrigerated. Pregnant women should try as much as possible to eat food that is freshly prepared or has just been cooked, both at home and eating out. They should also avoid salad bars and smorgasbords.

“Pregnant women should also avoid certain chilled ready-to-eat foods. These are:

- soft cheeses such as brie, camembert and ricotta;
- paté;
- raw or smoked seafood such as oysters, sashimi, smoked salmon, sushi (including frozen seafood but remember that canned seafood is safe);
- ready-made salads from a salad bar or prepackaged from the supermarket or deli; and
- ready-cooked cold meats, including chicken, from a deli, supermarket or sandwich bar.

“While listeria infections in Australia are rare, it is important that pregnant women avoid these foods because of the significant risk they pose to the unborn baby. The listeria bacteria can be difficult to diagnose during pregnancy, so

the best advice for women is to take preventative action and think food safety at all times. This message is also important for people with suppressed immune systems.

“To avoid listeria contamination when cooking at home, follow the usual food safety practices. For example, when handling raw meat thaw it in the refrigerator, where it should be covered, and make sure it cannot drip on other food. Always wash hands, knives and cutting boards in warm water and with soap after handling raw food. Cook food thoroughly and serve steaming hot and refrigerate any left overs as soon as they have stopped steaming.” Dr Healy concluded.

According to OzFoodNet—a network for enhancing foodborne disease surveillance—there were 60 reported listeria infections in Australia during 2000. Fifteen of these infections were in pregnant women, and the remaining 45 infections were in people with suppressed immune systems or undergoing immuno-suppressive therapy.

A brochure on Listeria and Pregnancy is available free of charge from ANZFA’s website www.anzfa.gov.au or by contacting ANZFA on (02) 6271 2241.

New style assessment reports have arrived

ANZFA is aiming to ensure the community is better able to comment on proposed changes to the Food Standards Code by introducing a new format for its assessment reports.

These changes follow on from recent changes in terminology for ANZFA’s assessment reports and three-stage consultation process, which are:

New	Old
Initial Assessment	Preliminary Assessment
Draft Assessment	Full Assessment
Final Assessment	Inquiry

Feedback received by ANZFA indicated that people thought that information contained in the old type of assessment reports was inaccessible and difficult to understand. People also felt that there was a need for greater transparency in consideration of submissions on proposed changes to the Food Standards Code.

The new report format is seeking to ensure improved consultation to support ANZFA’s decision-making. We are aiming to consult more effectively much earlier in the process.

The first stage of the process is an Initial Assessment report. One of the key aspects of this document will be to guide input from the community on the key issues raised by the proposed amendment to the Food Standards Code. The report will give background information on the issue under consideration and provide questions for consideration by the community. This will enable stakeholders to contribute to our thinking on the issue at a very early stage, but not confine their commentary just to our questions.

When the Draft Assessment Reports are issued, the submissions we receive on the subject will be summarised as an attachment to the report to allow those who contributed to check that we have fairly summarised their position and to allow all to see the range of views we have taken into account in forming our recommendation.

The new style reports have three main components:

- (1) The Executive Summary. We will use plain English.
- (2) A Risk Management Decision Paper, outlining what the problem is that we are addressing, what our options are, the

scientific issues and the likely impacts of each option. It will also include the proposed new food standard.

- (3) A detailed Scientific Risk Assessment identifying the risks to public health and safety.

As well as being able to see all related papers on the ANZFA website, stakeholders are also encouraged to make submissions on assessment reports via the website.

The Draft Assessment report is an opportunity for stakeholders to comment on the proposed regulatory outcome, including the scientific risk assessment, regulatory impact assessment and draft standard.

The Final Assessment Report is ANZFA’s recommendation to Ministers, together with the justification and supporting documents, such as the summary of submissions.

These changes are aimed at making our processes more open and transparent. ANZFA welcomes comments and feedback on these new arrangements. The contact person within ANZFA is Adam Luckhurst, Program Manager, Strategic Development who can be contacted on (02) 6271 2605 or by email on adam.luckhurst@anzfa.gov.au.

ANZFA participates in two major international conferences

6th OCEANIAFOODS meeting

Over twenty delegates from six countries and two international organisations gathered in Brisbane in February for the 6th OCEANIAFOODS meeting, chaired by ANZFA. OCEANIAFOODS is a Pacific region network of government and research agencies involved in food composition. It operates under the umbrella of the INFOODS (International Network of Food Data Systems) program of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), which were joint sponsors of OCEANIAFOODS.

Uses of food composition data, publication of data in the age of the internet and the analysis of vitamins were key areas of discussion. Some of the presentations focussed on food composition issues unique to the Oceania region, such as the impact of earth-oven ('lovo') cooking methods on nutrient composition and the identification of indigenous plants that are rich sources of carotenoids. Recommendations for future activities of the group included establishing an OCEANIAFOODS page on the FAO website (www.fao.org/infoods) to promote information sharing among members and strengthening professional education about food composition. The FAO will also investigate holding its popular postgraduate training program on food composition data, operated by the United Nations University, in the Pacific region.

Participation in OCEANIAFOODS helps ANZFA to stay up to date with international developments in food composition data which facilitates the development of food standards. This is also vital in helping us prepare and release the best possible food composition data, such as the data used to support ANZFA's Nutrition Panel Calculator.

The proceedings of the meeting will be published later this year. The next OCEANIAFOODS meeting will be held in New Zealand in 2004. Enquiries about OCEANIAFOODS can be sent to Judy Cunningham at judy.cunningham@anzfa.gov.au.

2nd International Total Diet Workshop

ANZFA jointly conducted a two-week workshop in Brisbane from 4 – 15 February 2002 in association with the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the New Zealand Ministry of Health. It was attended by 70 people from 30 countries, including a number of participants from developing countries. The workshop aimed to facilitate information exchange, to update participants on recent developments in the field of total diet studies and to help developing countries to conduct their first total diet study.

Some of the countries involved with the workshop have a large amount of experience in planning and conducting total diet studies,

such as Australia and New Zealand which have been conducting total diet surveys for 25 to 30 years, while a number of other countries had not commenced a study, but were very keen to learn.

Total diet studies are the means by which health authorities in different countries can make the best estimate of the dietary exposure of their populations to chemical residues and contaminants, such as heavy metals in the food supply. They are a key public health risk assessment tool as the information produced can be used to identify actual or potential public health concerns that can then be addressed by risk managers. Scientific risk assessments are also fundamental to ensure the protection of public health and safety in the development of food standards by ANZFA. A key feature is that foods are produced 'table ready', as this provides the best means of assessing the risk to consumers.

A significant outcome was an agreement to coordinate regional groupings that would assist in capacity building to prepare developing countries within the group to conduct their own studies. This will allow economies in training, preparation of procedures manuals and sample analysis. The WHO will coordinate the funding of this project.

ANZFA Board meets in Wellington



(L to R) Kitty Bennett and Jacqui Te Kani, Maori Women's Welfare League, ANZFA's Chair Michael MacKellar and Bronwen Hannay, NZ Nutrition Foundation at the stakeholders forum in New Zealand.

Members of the Maori Reference Group pictured with the ANZFA Board



EATWELL AUSTRALIA

SIGNAL, the Strategic Inter-Governmental Nutrition Alliance, recently released the National Nutritional Strategy – "EatWell Australia: An Agenda for Action for Public Health Nutrition". This is a guide to Australia's investment in public health nutrition for the next ten years.

EatWell Australia (EWA) provides a 'whole of population' framework including initiatives that can benefit indigenous people, in both health gain and capacity building. More specifically, it addresses population groups more vulnerable to poor nutrition, which includes indigenous people.

EWA also contains the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nutrition Strategy and Action Plan (NATSINSAP). This plan was created by and for indigenous people. It reflects the community base that is at the core of successful interventions in indigenous health, and the structures, such as NACCHO (National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations) and OATSIH (Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health).

Copies of both documents are available from the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, publications line 1800 020 103 (ext 8654) or may be down loaded from the SIGNAL website www.nphp.gov.au/signal

What is ANZFA?

ANZFA's role is to protect the health and safety of people in Australia and New Zealand through the maintenance of a safe food supply.

ANZFA is a partnership between ten governments: the Federal, State and Territory governments of Australia and the New Zealand Government. It is a statutory authority under Australian Commonwealth law and an independent, expert body.

ANZFA is responsible for developing, varying and reviewing standards for food available in Australia and New Zealand and for a range of other functions including coordinating national food surveillance and recall systems, conducting research, assessing policies about imported food and developing codes of practice with industry.

ANZFA staff include toxicologists, microbiologists, food technologists, nutritionists and a range of professionals who provide legal, communications, policy and administrative advice.

ANZFA contact details

PO Box 7186
Canberra BC 2610
Australia

PO Box 10559
Wellington 6036
New Zealand

Ph: (02) 6271 2222

(04) 473 9942

Fax: (02) 6271 2278

(04) 473 9855

www.anzfa.gov.au

www.anzfa.govt.nz

Email: info@anzfa.gov.au

nz.reception@anzfa.gov.au

Call the **Food Code Hotline** for information on the new standards on **1 300 652 166** in Australia or **0 800 441 571** in New Zealand.
Email: advice@anzfa.gov.au

Order form

To be added to our mailing list for Food Standards News please fill in the details below and return by:

Mail

Information Officer
ANZFA
PO Box 7186
Canberra BC 2610
Australia

PO Box 10559
Wellington 6036
New Zealand

Fax

(02) 6271 2278

(04) 473 9855

Name _____

Position _____

Organisation _____

Address _____

Postcode _____

Ph _____

Fax _____

Email _____

No. of copies required _____

Articles from *Food Standards News* may be reproduced with appropriate acknowledgement.

ISSN 1440-8058

ANZFA's Chief Scientist, Dr Marion Healy, talks about infant formula products

After a marathon process, ANZFA has released its recommended revised draft standard for infant formula products that are designed to meet the nutritional needs of infants up to twelve months of age. This review of the regulation of infant formula products has updated requirements, taking account of advances in scientific and technological knowledge, and has developed a harmonised standard to apply in both Australia and New Zealand.

While clearly breast milk provides the greatest health benefits to infants, it is also recognised that there are circumstances in which an infant is unable to be breast-fed. In this case, infant formula is the next best feeding choice, and as such must be safe and nutritionally adequate. The revised standard more explicitly regulates a wider of range of infant formula products than the current standards in Australia and New Zealand, and specifically identifies separate categories of formula products for healthy infants, and those for infants with special nutritional requirements (eg. soy based, low lactose and special dietary uses).

In reviewing the requirements for infant formula products, a risk and evidence based approach was utilised, where available, to characterise potential risks and to develop appropriate measures to control those risks. A very cautious approach has been adopted in developing the requirements for infant formula products. This recognises that infants are amongst the most vulnerable groups in our community and that formula products are likely to be the sole source of nutrition in the first few months of life for some infants.

This cautious approach is reflected in the maintenance of infant formula products as 'special purpose' foods regulated by a discrete standard. This has the effect of specifying requirements that may be additional to those found in the 'horizontal' standards that apply to the general food supply such as microbiological, safety and general labelling issues.

The nutritional composition requirements have been significantly strengthened in the revised

standard. Notably, the requirements for protein content have been maintained. However the protein quality (levels of essential amino acids) has been reviewed to better reflect the amino acid profile of breast milk. This approach helps to assure adequacy for growth, but without the prospect of excess protein quantity. There are additional requirements relating to fatty acid levels including a newly prescribed minimum level for an essential fatty acid (alpha linolenic acid) as well as more control on the polyunsaturated fatty acid composition. The requirements for vitamins and minerals have also been reviewed in accordance with contemporary scientific evidence.

A number of the revised requirements address potential safety concerns. These include maximum levels of fatty acids, including those that might be toxic (eg erucic acid), mandatory maximum levels for some additional vitamins and minerals and for aluminium, and revised parameters to help ensure safe kidney function. Importantly, substances considered 'novel' under Standard 1.5.1 – Novel Foods must now be subjected to a safety assessment before approval for use in formula products. Finally, stringent labelling requirements are recommended, particularly to facilitate the appropriate and safe use of these foods and to ensure that the foods are appropriately depicted.

The revised draft Standard 2.9.1 – Infant Formula Products provides considerable nutritional and safety benefits and addresses a broader range of products than the current requirements. However, it is also apparent that there are gaps in scientific knowledge of some components of breast milk that are important to infant health, particularly those that optimise nutritional benefits. Scientific developments will continue to be monitored with a view to modifying the standard if new evidence suggests that the requirements can be further optimised to benefit infant health.

Further information on the revised standard is available from ANZFA's web site (www.anzfa.gov.au or www.anzfa.govt.nz).

Subscribe to Food Standards News electronically and receive ANZFA's new Food Standards Update

Food Standards News is going electronic, which means you could receive it by email two weeks before a printed edition. We will be writing to you shortly as a current subscriber providing you with a user name and password and to let you know how to register your details through our website. Once you have registered your details you will not only receive Food Standards News by email but also the Food Standards Update email service which will notify you of any media release, fact sheet, recall information or other news we may issue

in between editions. Both will be provided free of charge.

Food Standards News will be sent in the text of the message and not as an attachment, so it should suit all email systems. We will also email you a link to the website so you can open up the colour version from the website, and print it out if you wish.

We will continue to publish Food Standards News in hard copy for those who need to receive it in that form.