

Proposal P298 – Benzoate and Sulphite Permissions in Food IAR

Summary

The NSW Food Authority prefers a combination of option 2 and option 3.

Specific Issues

The Authority supports a combination of option 2 and option 3.

P298 identified concern for dietary exposure of children to benzoates and sulphites up to 5 years of age and identified particular foods as major contributors to this group exceeding their ADI.

From the information provided in P298, option 2 would be appropriate to address current concern for the age category exceeding their ADI. As particular foods have been identified as contributing to the age category exceeding their ADI, a review of the permissions for benzoates and sulphites in the identified major foods should be considered.

However the Authority does not support option 2 on its own as there is presently insufficient technological information to justify reducing preservative permissions. The impact of reducing permissions in relation to microbial spoilage, additional costs to the food industry and enforcement agencies would need to be fully assessed.

Option 3 which would review and look to partially replace benzoates and sulphites through alternative preservation methods provides the appropriate mechanism to address the issue whilst minimising the impact on stakeholders.

Reliance on Option 4 (consumer education option) as a sole approach is unlikely to be effective without a large investment of resources. Furthermore, a consumer education strategy favours groups of higher socio economic status. Food supply options 2 and 3 are more likely to be effective in protecting the whole population. Consumer education, however, may be a suitable adjunct to other options.

Therefore the Authority supports the reduction of the levels of benzoates and sulphites in foods through replacement with alternative preservation methods which involves a combination of options 2 and 3.

The Authority notes that a more detailed assessment will be conducted at the draft assessment stage.