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Submission to Primary Production Committee on the Food Bill

The National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) is an umbrella organisation representing 50 nationally organised societies and national members. It has 26 branches throughout the country attended by representatives of these societies and 150 other societies as well as individual members. The Council's function is to serve women, the family and the community at local, national and international levels through research, study, discussion and action.

The council as the spokesperson for these women's groups has had a long term interest in the development of Good Safety Standards and Good Policy and has written a number of submissions relating to food products, the development of standards and transitional arrangements over many years.

Primarily NCWNZ's concern has been with the protection and management of health and safety risks from a consumer perspective. NCWNZ representatives have attended workshops and stakeholder meetings since work started on the extensive review of the domestic food regulatory programme that has been offered by the New Zealand Food Safety Authority since 2003.

Comments

NCWNZ believes that the Food Bill will ensure greater protection for the consumer by providing an efficient, effective and risk-based programme that manages domestic food safety and suitability issues. Our members expressed concern that it has taken 'extra time' to write the new Food Bill and develop the legislation, however they agreed that this has offered an opportunity to test systems in the new regime and has offered food operators more time to develop skills and systems to support the new environment.

During the development of the policy for the new Food Bill, NCWNZ submission responses expressed concerns about the high levels of food-borne illnesses in New Zealand.

The new Food Bill will impose a duty on all food producers and sellers to protect their consumers and ensure that food is safe and suitable for public consumption. Also rapid changes and expansion in the range of foods available, the way of preparing, handling and storing food and the emergence of new food-borne pathogens strengthens the need to change domestic food regulations.

Conclusion

The new Food Bill sets out a comprehensive regime for managing domestic food safety and suitability issues and applies to all food sold and produced in New Zealand regardless of whether the food is intended for the domestic market or for export. The new Food Bill is timely, as food safety is an increasingly important issue not only in New Zealand but also globally. Protection of New Zealand's reputation as a producer of safe food is vital by having an internationally accepted regime in place to compete on the international market as well as providing greater protection for consumers in New Zealand or overseas.

Food Safety and suitability is an important public health issue and education for consumers' about safe food handling and awareness of the valuable role they play in protecting their family's health by following good food safety practices at home is also of vital importance.

NCWNZ thanks the Select Committee for the opportunity to make comment on this Bill.

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National President

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Consumer Affairs Standing Committee