

Food Standards Australia New Zealand

28 September 2014

Health Claims – Formulated Supplementary Sports Foods & Electrolyte Drinks
FOOD REGULATION POLICY OPTIONS PAPER

The public consultation document available from Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) proposes that electrolyte drinks like Gatorade

1. Be moved to a standard 2.9.4 Formulated Supplementary Sports Foods from 2.6.2 Non Alcoholic Beverages And Brewed Soft Drinks
2. That a health claim be allowed

be allowed to carry health claims promoting the product as beneficial for hydration and replenishment of carbohydrates and electrolytes lost as a result of sustained strenuous physical activity – despite containing around nine teaspoons of sugar.

FSANZ is guided by ethical principles:

Vision: A safe food supply protecting and supporting the health of people in Australia and New Zealand.

Mission: To develop effective food standards in collaboration with the Australian and New Zealand governments.

Australia and New Zealand has a platform of regulation around health claims on foods. They are criteria based and “refer to a relationship between a food and health rather than a statement of content” General level health claims refer to a nutrient or a substance in a food and its effect on a health function

“<http://www.foodstandards.govt.nz/consumer/labelling/nutrition/Pages/default.aspx>”

A health claim on a formulated electrolyte drink does not meet the intent of the regulation or FSANZ – of safe food supply protecting and supporting the health of people in Australia and New Zealand. It is not intended to promote business opportunities and commercialism for industries that have a limited target audience – arguably sport performance is not about health as defined by the World Health Organisation.

Sport and electrolyte drinks are not a food. Foods (apart from pure water) are derived from plants and animals.

A health claim cannot be made on water, sugar or electrolytes in isolation – it is not logical to allow a formulation to do this.

Comparison with water as evidence is not logical- hydration by definition requires water – comparison with fruit juice (not able to have a health claim but containing sugar and electrolytes) may be more meaningful. Many sports drinks have colour added and while permitted there is an argument to exclude these from foods – particularly for pregnant women and children. The next step would be for caffeinated drinks to be considered for claims – yet caffeine like colour is not a nutrient. Have the harms been balanced and equally researched to the benefits? Proof of lack of harm is not proof of safety.

Finally we request that FSANZ thinks seriously about the implications for dental health, particularly for children, recognised by the World Health Organisation in their draft recommendations for intake of free sugars – Australia and New Zealand are member states.

Further the World Health organisation has a policy on marketing to children to reduce the impact on children of marketing of foods high in....free sugars or salt..

http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2010/9789241500210_eng.pdf

The ability to put a general health claim on a sports drink or product would seriously undermine the principles of health promotion and may be detrimental to dental and general health increasing costs to the public health system.

An example is the health messages in Project Energize which reaches over 65000 children in New Zealand – water and low fat milk are the best drinks. As part of the professional development for teachers and modelling for the children resources show how many teaspoons of sugar in fruit juice, fruit drink, sports drinks and energy drinks.

I strongly argue that health claims on sports drinks and products not be allowed – 1. To protect our children and 2. To ensure the validity of health claims allowed in Australia and New Zealand.

Yours faithfully

A black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Elaine Rush.

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