

The Committee Secretary

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture and industry.

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Parliament House

Canberra ACT 2600

Submission from Ken Grundy on behalf of the Made in Australia Campaign

Consumers have a real desire for food labelling to be more informative and for that information to be accurate.

A common phrase on labels currently reads “Made in Australia from local and imported goods”. This is useless information when one considers the only Australian component may be the glass container in which the food is stored. It is worse than useless because it hides the real truth and is therefore deceptive.

Customers often wish to support or avoid products depending on country of origin and clear meaningful labels will permit them to achieve that aim. Even though Australia may have very good olive oil, some customers may seek the oil from Italy. Conversely, customers wishing to support a local product would seek the ‘Australian made’ label.

A ‘Product of New Zealand’ label once held an image of quality, since it was produced by our cousins across the ditch under environmental circumstances much like our own. However since New Zealand has established a Trade Agreement with China, a lot of foodstuff is imported to NZ from China in bulk form. The bulk product is re-packaged to consumer-size units and sent to Australia with no reference to its Chinese origin. Such practice is deceiving the Australian customer.

The country of origin needs to extend to ingredients as well. Perhaps an example might be a tin of baked beans in tomato sauce. The label should state that, for example, the beans were Australian and the tomatoes were Italian.

It is accepted that where a multiple of ingredients make up the content, the very minor ones could be excluded from the 'country of origin' requirement. Using the baked beans example again, the presence of salt must be included on the label but its origin could be excluded. This exclusion would make for a more practical label and help reduce some compliance burden.

The current laws certainly do not provide enough information to a customer wishing to make an informed choice when shopping.

Whether our laws on food labelling would affect trade obligations, is an interesting subject. I sense this refers to Trade Agreements containing the Investor-State Disputes Settlement clause. If we cannot establish a suitable regime of food labelling in Australia without invoking the wrath of foreign entities through the ISDS, then we certainly should not entertain its inclusion in any trade deals. If your enquiry has done nothing more than expose the ridiculous implications of the ISDS, then it will have achieved something.

Ken Grundy

For Made in Australia Campaign

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