

Submission to the Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Banning Dirty Donations) Bill 2020

Summary of main comments:

I am supportive of the bill, however I am concerned about the omission of food industry from the list of organisations.

I suggest an amendment to the existing bill so that food industry and their representative bodies are incorporated within this bill.

Background

I have been practising as a public health nutritionist for over 20 years in several states in Australia and New Zealand. Over that time, I have seen major changes to our food environment where food and drink of poor nutrition quality has become widely available, heavily marketed and promoted cheaply. The spread of fast food outlets and ultra- and highly processed foods, such as packaged snacks, confectionery and sugary drinks, are now available 24/7. Along with a sedentary lifestyle, this 'obesogenic' environment is leading to increased rates of preventable diseases such as obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and some cancers. The annual loss in productivity in Australia that can be attributed to individual risk factors for obesity alone is between \$840 million and \$14.9 billion.¹

Reasons for inclusion of food industry

I am increasingly concerned about the influence of the food industry on our food supply as well as their influence on government public health strategies and policies.

The Obesity Evidence Hub has highlighted a range of tactics used by major food industries and their representative bodies, to influence political processes, one of which includes donations to Australian political parties.²

Additionally, we have seen evidence of the influence of food industry in public health nutrition strategy in Australia in two areas – the Senate inquiry into the Obesity Epidemic in Australia in 2018; and the introduction of Health Star Rating System in 2014.³

¹ The economic cost of preventable disease in Australia: a systematic review of estimates and methods. Aust N Z J Public Health 2019 Oct;43(5):484-495

²<https://www.obesityevidencehub.org.au/collections/environmental/corporate-political-activity-of-the-processed-and-fast-food-industries-in-australia>

³ <https://www.obesityevidencehub.org.au/collections/environmental/industry-influence-two-recent-australian-case-studies>

A recent paper from Sainsbury et al 2020, has highlighted the barriers to enactment of evidence based nutrition policy in Australia, citing one of the factors as industry influence⁴

Marion Nestle also provides evidence of how food lobbyists and political donations can exert a powerful influence on government nutrition policy⁵

For the reasons above, I believe food industry should be included on the list of organisations in the bill.

Suggested terminology to include in the bill to incorporate food industry:

I suggest that 'the food industry' is the terminology used in the list of organisations to keep it simple and direct and aligned with the other descriptions of organisations.

This would encompass the industries that are producing highly processed foods, and those from multi-national food industries such as the following:

- Soft drink manufacturing industry
- Snack food manufacturing industry
- fast food and takeaway service industry
- chocolate and confectionery manufacturing industry

Should there be the need to exclude producers such as fruit and vegetable producers/retailers and boutique food producers from this restriction, then the terminology could be adjusted to "Highly-processed food industries and multi-national food industry"

Thank you for considering this submission.

Yours sincerely,

⁴ Explaining resistance to regulatory interventions to prevent obesity and improve nutrition: A case-study of a sugar-sweetened beverages tax in Australia: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0306919220301081>

⁵ Food Politics: How the food industry influences nutrition and health by Marion Nestle, 2002, University of California Press