



GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO  
REPORT OF HEALTH COMMITTEE  
ON  
PARLIAMENTARY PETITION 1999/36  
OF CHRISTINE ROGAN AND 7279 OTHERS

Presented to the House of Representatives  
in accordance with Standing Order 248

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REPORT OF HEALTH COMMITTEE  
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**INTRODUCTION**

The Government has carefully considered the Committee's report on Petition 1999/36 of Christine Rogan and 7279 others. The petition requested that the House of Representatives legislate that all alcoholic beverages in New Zealand carry health and safety messages including the warning that drinking alcohol during pregnancy can cause birth defects.

The Government responds to the report in accordance with Standing Order 248.

**RECOMMENDATION AND GOVERNMENT RESPONSE**

**Recommendation 1:**

- the Government develop legislation to require mandatory warning labels to be placed on all types of alcoholic liquor reminding women of the dangers of drinking alcohol during pregnancy

**Response:**

The Government supports the message that women should not drink during pregnancy and supports, in principle, warning labels on containers of alcohol reminding women of the dangers of drinking alcohol during pregnancy.

The labelling of alcohol products falls within the scope of the joint Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code ('the Code').

In December 1995, the New Zealand Government entered into a treaty with Australia in the form of the *Agreement Between the Government of New Zealand and the Government of Australia Establishing a System for the Development of Joint Food Standards* (the "Food Standards Treaty"). This established a joint food standards setting system, which was brought into force in New Zealand on 1 July 1996. The underlying aims of the joint system are to consider the needs of both New Zealand and Australia, to protect the public health of both countries, and reduce unnecessary barriers to trade. The outcome of the Food Standards Treaty is the Code.

Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) has responsibility for developing and approving standards and variations to the Code. Notices are published in Australia and New Zealand seeking comment from the public on applications and proposals. FSANZ are required to take into account any submissions received from the public; the protection of public health and safety; the provision of adequate information relating to food to enable consumers to make informed choices and the prevention of misleading or

deceptive conduct. If a standard or variation is approved by FSANZ, the Ministerial Council is notified. The Ministerial Council may then seek review of the standard or variation by FSANZ, and after two reviews, may reject or amend the standard or variation. Once the Council review process is finalised, FSANZ may Gazette an amendment to the Code. An application to require warning statements on alcoholic beverages would need to pass through this process successfully.

The Alcohol Advisory Council (ALAC) and the Ministry of Health in consultation with relevant government agencies, will prepare an application to FSANZ. The application will propose that the Code be amended so that all containers of alcohol beverages be required to be labelled with a warning reminding of the dangers of drinking during pregnancy.

**Recommendation 2:**

- the warning labels be supported with a range of initiatives, including health promotion and education about foetal alcohol syndrome, the impact it can have on an unborn baby, and how to prevent it

**Response:**

Key government agencies are currently involved in supporting a number of initiatives relating to reminding women of the potential dangers of drinking while pregnant.

One of the objectives of the Government's National Alcohol Strategy is to "develop and actively disseminate information about alcohol and pregnancy to young women, including culturally appropriate information for young Māori and Pacific women.

The Alcohol Advisory Council of New Zealand (ALAC) has developed Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) and Foetal Alcohol Effects (FAE) resources in English, Māori and 6 Pacific languages. It has developed a TV campaign, provided advice and information for a documentary, and developed a video. ALAC has developed some resources specifically for women, including *Women and Alcohol*. There are two specific areas for women on ALAC's website [www.alcohol.org.nz](http://www.alcohol.org.nz). An ALAC-funded video on FAS/FAE and pamphlet resources have been disseminated to General Practitioners.

The work of advocacy groups such as the Foetal Alcohol New Zealand Trust (FANZ) also assists in delivering educational messages about FAS and FAE.

The Government will continue to support initiatives that remind women of the potential dangers of drinking while pregnant.

**Recommendation 3:**

- that increased research be undertaken, to establish harmful consumption levels and the prevalence of alcohol-related birth disorders

**Response:**

Current research does not suggest a clear threshold of consumption of alcohol and the development of FAS or FAE. It appears that the unborn baby is at little or no risk if the mother consumes alcohol at very light levels. However, both the Ministry of Health and ALAC recommend abstinence during pregnancy, as there is also no proven safe level of alcohol intake during pregnancy. The Government supports increased assessments of international and New Zealand evidence on what constitutes harmful consumption levels.

There is a lack of New Zealand specific data about the prevalence of FAS and ARND, although estimates have been made using international prevalence data. Current advice is that the most appropriate way to collect New Zealand specific prevalence and/or incidence data is through a survey or research project. No such study is currently being funded by the Health Research Council or ALAC. The Ministry of Health and ALAC will jointly consider a research study that aims to collect data on the prevalence and/or incidence of FAS in New Zealand. This could be considered for funding by either ALAC or the Health Research Council.

In order to determine whether there is a reduction in the prevalence of drinking among pregnant women and women planning pregnancy, the Ministry of Health and ALAC are working with the Centre for Social and Health Outcomes Research and Evaluation (SHORE) to collect baseline data by including questions regarding alcohol and pregnancy in future surveys of alcohol use.

**CONCLUSION**

The Government welcomes the Health Committee report on the petition of Christine Rogan and 7279 others. The Government will investigate using available avenues to implement the recommendations of the Health Committee.