



15 December 2023

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Tēnā koe

Attached are the comments that the New Zealand Food and Grocery Council wishes to present on the *Call for submissions – Application A1273: Steviol glycosides as a food additive in food for special medical purposes*.

Ngā mihi nui

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "Raewyn Bleakley". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Raewyn Bleakley
Chief Executive



**Call for submissions – Application A1273:
Steviol glycosides as a food additive in
food for special medical purposes.**

**Submission by the New Zealand Food and Grocery
Council**

15 December 2023

NEW ZEALAND FOOD AND GROCERY COUNCIL

1. The New Zealand Food and Grocery Council (**NZFGC**) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the *Call for submissions – Application A1273: Steviol glycosides as a food additive in food for special medical purposes..*
2. NZFGC represents the major manufacturers and suppliers of food, beverage and grocery products in New Zealand. This sector generates over \$40 billion in the New Zealand domestic retail food, beverage and grocery products market, and over \$34 billion in export revenue from exports to 195 countries – representing 65% of total good and services exports. Food and beverage manufacturing is the largest manufacturing sector in New Zealand, representing 45% of total manufacturing income. Our members directly or indirectly employ more than 493,000 people – one in five of the workforce.

THE APPLICATION

3. Nestlé Australia Limited and Nestlé New Zealand Limited (**Nestlé**) has sought an amendment the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code (**the Food Standards Code**) that would allow the food additive ‘steviol glycosides’ to be added to Food for Special Medical Purposes (**FSMP**). Nestlé is a multinational food and drink processing conglomerate corporation headquartered in Switzerland. Nestlé has more than 2,000 brands globally.
4. Nestlé’s FSMP range sold in Australia and New Zealand is largely manufactured in Europe and distributed worldwide from that base. Those FSMP products that contain steviol glycosides cannot yet be sold in Australia or New Zealand because the additive needs to be specifically approved by Food Standards Australia New Zealand (**FSANZ**) for addition to such products.

COMMENTS

5. A number of intense sweeteners are already permitted to be used in the manufacture of FSMP, however steviol glycosides are not included.
6. The Food Standards Code currently provides for the addition of steviol glycosides to many general purpose foods including milk, ice cream, beverages, confectionery, chocolate, biscuits, cakes, fancy breads, desserts, custards, sauces and sports foods.

Food technology assessment

7. FSANZ’s food technology assessment concluded that the use of steviol glycosides as a food additive in FSMP was consistent with its typical technological function as an intense sweetener. The evidence provided by Nestlé confirmed that the use of steviol glycosides, was technologically justified and effective in achieving its stated purpose. The category of FSMP that are formulated for a very low energy diet has a greater technological need for intense sweeteners than other FSMP.

Toxicology assessment

8. FSANZ has previously assessed an extensive toxicological database on steviol glycosides, which identified no safety concerns or a need to amend the acceptable daily intake (**ADI**) established by FSANZ in 2008 of 0-4 mg/kg bw for steviol glycosides, expressed as steviol equivalents (the Food Standards Code contains details for calculating steviol equivalents).

Dietary exposure assessment

9. FSANZ conducted dietary exposure assessments to estimate the level of chronic exposure to steviol glycosides (expressed as steviol equivalents) from manufactured very low energy foods produced for consumption as part of a very low energy diet, and for all other FSMP.
10. When used at the proposed maximum permitted level of 330 mg/kg, estimated dietary exposures from very low energy diet (and other general purpose foods containing steviol glycosides) did not exceed the ADI. However, FSANZ found that dietary exposures for adults, adolescents and children from other FSMP when used as a sole source of nutrition exceeded the ADI. If a lower maximum permitted level of steviol glycosides for other FSMP was applied (calculated by FSANZ as 75 mg/kg), exposures would not exceed the ADI for FSMP used as a sole source of nutrition.
11. FSANZ acknowledged that the reason Nestlé applied to amend the Food Standards Code was to align the Australian and New Zealand standard with international permissions, as many FSMP products are imported into Australia and New Zealand from other countries. FSMP are intended to be consumed by limited population groups and consumers often rely on accessing FSMP from countries outside of Australia and New Zealand. It is often the case that FSMP used as a sole source of nutrition are not used for a lifetime but rather for limited periods. The ADI is applied for a whole of life.
12. It is not clear why the scenario of 'Usual Use Levels' was not applied for the dietary exposure estimates since an estimate based on MPLs is highly conservative and is not likely to occur in reality.

International MPLs

13. Internationally, Codex permits the addition of steviol glycosides to FSMP between 270 and 350 mg/kg. Singapore permits the addition of steviol glycosides to FSMP up to 175 mg/kg, and Turkey permits the addition of steviol glycosides to FSMP up to 330 mg/kg (excluding products for infants and young children). Distinctions are not made for the levels in very low energy diet as distinct from other FSMP.
14. Therefore, we are disappointed at the departure from the proposed MPL for FSMP other than very low energy diet FSMP (on the assumption that these are all the sole source of nutrition) that is far lower than any other FSMP approved level internationally and which may impact future imports and innovation.

NZFGC Conclusion

15. Nonetheless, NZFGC supports the levels proposed by FSANZ for both very low energy diet FSMP and other FSMP that are sole sources of nutrition and which are reflected in the drafting of the amendment to the Food Standards Code.
16. We consider that for non-very low energy diet FSMP, this might be a first step in the use of steviol glycosides. It is possible that other applications may be made in the future for a higher level for FSMP that are sole sources of nutrition to apply at a time when 'Usual Use Levels' could be clearer.