

COMMUNIQUE

Health Star Rating Advisory Committee Meeting – 30 November 2021

The Health Star Rating (HSR) is a front-of-pack labelling system that rates the overall nutritional profile of packaged food and assigns it a rating from ½ a star to 5 stars. It provides a quick, easy, standard way to compare similar packaged foods.

The role of the Advisory Committee is to provide governance support to the continued implementation of the HSR system. The Health Star Rating Advisory Committee (HSRAC) met on 30 November 2021 via video conference.

Key outcomes from the meeting include:

Communication and Transparency

Members considered the need to provide transparency of HSRAC decisions to interested stakeholders. Members agreed to publish a communiqué on the HSR website following each meeting with information on any decisions made.

Form of the Food – further consideration

In most cases the HSR should be calculated and displayed based on the nutrition content of the products as it appears on the shelf (i.e. as sold). Specific exemptions apply for products which: instruct the consumer to rehydrate with, diluted with or mix with water, or to drain off water or brine from the product prior to consumption. The HSR for these products can be calculated on the product 'as prepared'. Updates to the form of the food exception were considered and finalised in the 5 Year Review.

On 21 October 2021, Members agreed on additional guidance to support manufacturers and retailers to implement updated rules. The additional guidance focused on products that are drained of liquid other than water or brine (e.g. oil); and can be found within the HSR system Calculator and Style Guide available on the HSR website.

At this meeting members considered whether additional guidance should be developed to provide support to the food industry and/or consumers with the practical implementation of the updated form of the food (or 'as prepared') exemption. Members agreed current guidance was adequate, this would be monitored and re-evaluated as needed.

HSR Guidance documents – review

Members requested updates to the HSRAC governance documents to ensure currency and relevance with the updated HSR system, along with providing ease of understanding for stakeholders. The HSRAC will regularly review of these documents.

Low alcoholic beverages

The HSR system currently permits beverages to display an HSR if the product contains ≤1.15% Alcohol by Volume (ABV). Given the growing market of low alcoholic beverages and no alcohol versions of alcoholic beverages, the HSRAC considered whether these products should display the HSR. This policy issue will be referred to the Food Regulation Standing Committee as the decision body.

The HSRAC's agreed position is displaying the HSR on low-alcoholic beverages and no alcohol versions of alcoholic beverages is not consistent with the intent of the HSR system. The HSRAC noted that the purpose of the HSR system to enable comparison with similar products, and as full strength alcohol products cannot display an HSR there is no ability for comparison. Therefore, the HSRAC strongly recommends against FRSC permitting the use of the HSR on these products.

Anomaly submissions

The HSRAC confirmed its decision to reject anomaly submission 2021-01 which sought to re-categorise water-based ice confections back to Category 2 – Foods. The decision to re-categorise ice confections as non-dairy beverages was a deliberate and well-considered decision during the 5-Year Review of the HSR system, thus the HSRAC noted it was not appropriate to classify this as an anomaly.

The HSRAC further agreed to reject anomaly submission 2021-02 which sought to categorise specific non-dairy pea protein powders under Category 1D – dairy beverages. The HSRAC found the pea protein products referenced in the submission did not appear to contain sufficient calcium required to be considered a dairy beverage under the HSR system.

Members agreed that an updated anomaly submission register would be published on the HSR website, along with the historical register for information. This register includes the rationale for HSRAC decisions on each anomaly submission.

Other

Each member of the HSRAC seeks to represent their broad sector. To ensure all interested parties have an avenue to provide positions on matters put forward to the HSRAC, members agreed to include key interested stakeholders in future targeted consultations as required to ensure whole of sector representation.