



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Federation Chamber**

**CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS**

**Advisory Panel on the Marketing  
in Australia of Infant Formula**

**SPEECH**

**Thursday, 13 February 2014**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Thursday, 13 February 2014  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** King, Catherine, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Ms KING** (Ballarat) (09:54): I rise today to speak on a decision that the government has made which probably has not made a lot of press but it is one, I think, that is very important to highlight here. It is the government's decision early on in its term to abolish the Advisory Panel on the Marketing in Australia of Infant Formula.

In 1981 Australia endorsed the WHO International Code of Marketing of Breast-Milk Substitutes. For more than 20 years governments have relied on an advisory panel to advise on the marketing of infant formula and monitor compliance with the WHO code and the industry agreement. MAIF was the agreement reached with industry as part of Australia's implementation of the code. In fact, it was the only section of the WHO code that we implemented. The advisory panel comprised of public health experts, industry representatives, legal experts, consumer representatives, nutrition experts and others. Quite importantly, it also had an independent chair.

The government decided to sack them all by press release. There was no prior notification. Since then, neither the Minister for Health nor the Assistant Minister for Health have been willing to explain their position or to justify this decision. That should not be too surprising, though; we know the government is not that interested in listening to the advice of experts or entertaining anyone that might be critical of it. The government thinks that the role of the advisory panel can somehow be undertaken by the Department of Health, despite the fact that it is determined to abolish huge swathes of the Department of Health and the department does not actually employ the expert advisors that were engaged on the advisory panel. That is why it was required in the first place.

I am given to understand that the department has now gone to the infant formula industry to see whether they will pay for such a panel—something that I think the Australian Breastfeeding Association, who I met with this week, has, quite rightly, some significant concerns about.

It is very important that Australians have access to clear and accurate information, especially when it comes to looking after children's health. Given the government's decision in this space, I am extremely concerned about what that means in terms of Australia's commitment to the WHO code, what that means in relation to having a place where people can complain about the inappropriate marketing of infant formula, and what that means for breastfeeding rates.

The Australian Breastfeeding Association have called for the reinstatement of the advisory panel. I, alongside many others, strongly support their claim. The ABA have been able to collect more than 3,300 signatures over the past week to support that campaign. I commend them on doing so, and I seek leave to table as a document the petition of 3,000 signatures to the Minister for Health to reinstate this panel.

Leave granted.