



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

**AUSTRALIA NEW ZEALAND
FOOD AUTHORITY
AMENDMENT BILL 1999 [NO. 2]**

In Committee

SPEECH

Tuesday, 7 December 1999

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

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Questioner	Responder
Speaker Stott Despoja, Sen Natasha	Question No.

Senator STOTT DESPOJA (SA) (5.53 pm)—I move Democrat amendment No. 2:

Schedule 1, item 9, page 6 (line 8), at the end of paragraph (i), add ", including the publication of information to increase public awareness of food standards and food labels".

Essentially, this amendment is designed to strengthen the educative role of the ANZFA. The need for the Australian community to have educative tools and campaigns specifically to increase public awareness of food standards and to be able to extract meaningful nutritional, allergenic and other information from food labels and products has been identified by health professionals, nutritionists, dietitians and educators throughout the community. This amendment is intended to clarify and include food standards and food labels as part of the ANZFA's educative activities. It is not restricted to only those activities. For example, when gene food labelling is implemented, consumers will need to know specifically what the statement 'may contain GM ingredients' means—if this term is adopted—or likewise for any other term. The ANZFA should provide information in supermarkets and any other accessible means about what these labels actually mean.

Another area of specific concern that individuals, consumer groups and health professionals have is the way that labels will accompany foods which have been irradiated or which contain ingredients which have been irradiated. Again, that is another debate that has been ongoing in the community and even in this place. The Democrats have put on record our concerns with that whole debate and recent decisions. The potential for misunderstanding a label that states 'contains ionised ingredients' or 'treated with ionised electrons' as was put forward as a possibility I believe by Senator Herron in his response to my question on notice on food irradiation is very likely. Many fear that some in the community could interpret such a label as meaning 'containing iron', or being some kind of fortified iron product. So education on food labels and standards is integral to facilitating consumers' individual right to choose what they consume. I think that must be the bottom line at the end of the day—that consumers have information, they have education, so they can make an informed choice.