

## Don't drink: message in a bottle for pregnant women

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Changes are being proposed for alcohol labels.

PREGNANT women would be warned of the dangers of drinking on every bottle of beer, wine and spirits in a plan to broaden food labelling laws.

First a government-appointed panel of legal, food and nutrition experts must determine if alcohol should be subjected to the same level of labelling scrutiny as other

foods, a public hearing into the review heard yesterday.

Neal Blewett, chairman of the Food Labelling Review panel, said alcohol labelling presented the panel with several anomalies. "At the moment alcohol is treated as a food but a distinct type of food," he said.

Labels must contain information on the alcoholic content and the number of standard drinks, but are exempt from nutritional information panels which include the amount of fat, sugar, protein and other nutrients in packaged foods.

Dr Blewett said some of the 6000-plus submissions to the review called for added warnings on labels about the general health dangers of alcohol.

The president of the Australian Medical Association, Andrew Pesce, supports clearer, more comprehensive alcohol labelling. "If [manufacturers are] going to start making claims about calorific content and carbohydrate content it should be more explicit and complete than selective," Dr Pesce said.

Sue Radd, a Sydney nutritionist, said consumers were kept in the dark about the "mega calories" in some alcoholic drinks.

Dr Blewett said the committee was also considering an independent food labelling regulator to manage the chaotic situation of food labelling enforcement. "Nine jurisdictions are involved in enforcing or monitoring food labelling laws."

He said the authority would be separate from Food Standards Australia New Zealand, which sets labelling policies.

Catriona Macmillan, of the Sydney Food Fairness Alliance, said health claims were too prominent on food labels. "Rather than having a lot of the space taken up with what's good for me, I would like to know what's in it."

The panel will consider public views on food labelling before it reports back to the government.

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