



644/1050

The Hon Tanya Plibersek MP
Minister for Health

The Hon John Murphy MP
Chair
Standing Committee on Petitions
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Murphy

Thank you for your letter of 15 March 2012 on behalf of the Standing Committee on Petitions, regarding a petition calling for the full implementation of the World Health Organization's International Code of Marketing of Breast Milk substitutes (WHO Code).

The Australian Government recognises that breastfeeding contributes to good health and is committed to assisting breastfeeding mothers and their families, promoting the value of breastfeeding and improving breastfeeding rates in Australia. The Commonwealth, state and territory governments are implementing the *Australian National Breastfeeding Strategy 2010-2015* which was endorsed by Australian Health Ministers in 2009. Under the Breastfeeding Strategy, the Australian Government has committed significant funding to breastfeeding initiatives, including \$2.5 million over five years to enable the Australian Breastfeeding Association to provide a toll-free 24 hour telephone helpline providing information and peer support for mothers and their families. This service is available on 1800 mum 2 mum (1800 686 268).

Australia's response to the WHO Code is currently being considered as part of the implementation of the Strategy. Australia currently implements the WHO Code in a number of ways that are considered appropriate for the social and economic environment in Australia. These approaches, which are a mixture of regulation, agreements and guidelines, have review mechanisms to ensure they continue to meet community needs.

Australia's primary means of implementing the WHO Code is the *Marketing in Australia of Infant Formulas: Manufacturers and Importers Agreement 1992* (MAIF Agreement), a voluntary, self-regulatory code of conduct between manufacturers and importers of infant formula in Australia. All major manufacturers and importers of infant formula in Australia are parties to the MAIF Agreement. Compliance with the MAIF Agreement is monitored by the Advisory Panel on the Marketing in Australia of Infant Formula (APMAIF), a non-statutory panel appointed by the Government.

Other measures used to implement the WHO Code include the *Infant Feeding Guidelines for Health Workers* and mandatory labelling and composition provisions for infant formula, included in the *Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code* (Standard 2.9.1).

The Australian Government has commenced an independent review of the MAIF Agreement which will also assist in informing Government policy in relation to the WHO Code. Further to this the Australian Government recently commissioned an international comparison study into the implementation of the WHO Code, other breastfeeding initiatives and breastfeeding rates in Australia and comparable developed countries, including New Zealand, Canada, United Kingdom, Norway and others. The findings of this study, available at www.health.gov.au/APMAIF, indicate that breastfeeding rates are influenced by a number of factors, including social and cultural attitudes as well as support networks.

The findings of these two projects will be used to appraise Australia's current measures in response to the WHO Code and to inform consideration of the merits, possible mechanisms and scope of any further measures to support breast feeding in Australia.

On a personal note and as the mother of three children who were all breastfed for at least the first year of life, I can assure you that I am aware of the benefits of breastfeeding for both my children and myself and will work to increase breastfeeding rates in Australia.

I am proud of our 24 hour Breastfeeding Helpline and of the introduction of Australia's first National Paid Parental Leave Scheme, which helps mothers recover from the birth, establish breastfeeding and bond with their new baby, while providing families with more financial security in the first months of a new baby's life. If the mother wishes to return to work early, she may transfer some or all of the unused Parental Leave Pay to her partner or co-parent, enabling the baby to visit for feeds. From 1 January 2013, the scheme will be extended with two weeks Dad and Partner Pay.

Once again, thank you for writing.

Yours sincerely

Tanya Plibersek

28.5.12