



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NATIONAL OBESITY PREVENTION STRATEGY REGRETTABLY IGNORES BEVERAGES INDUSTRY EFFORTS

TUESDAY, 8 MARCH 2022, SYDNEY:

The Australian Beverages Council Limited (ABCL) welcomes the release of the National Obesity Prevention Strategy 2022-2032 (NOPS), to reduce the prevalence of obesity among the Australian population over the next decade.

“Obesity is complex and multi-factorial. The Strategy attempts to address those complexities through a comprehensive framework but the beverages industry rejects the blinkered view the Strategy takes to single out proposed discriminatory regulation and unsubstantiated fiscal policy approaches for non-alcoholic drinks. Unfortunately, the Strategy is ignoring the current evidence base that is demonstrating a 20-year trend shift in consumer purchasing behaviour away from sugar-sweetened beverages, towards low- and no-sugar options including bottled water, during the same time that obesity rates have continued to rise” says Australian Beverages Council’s CEO, Geoff Parker.

Non-alcoholic beverages manufacturers are paving the way for rest of the shopping trolley to reduce sugar consumption and provide broader informed choice for Australians that support a healthy and balanced diet. The industry has brought speed and scale to its portfolio renovation with its flagship [Sugar Reduction Pledge](#) – a commitment by the nation’s largest drink companies to reduce sugar across their portfolios by 20 per cent by 2025 – a goal the industry is already well on the way to exceeding with the [latest progress report](#) to end of 2020 showing a 12 per cent reduction in sugar. The non-alcoholic drink industry’s Pledge is the first time a sector has united to reduce sugar and shows the drinks industry has stepped up to play its part in offering consumers more choice. The industry encourages other sectors of the food supply to launch their own pledges and play their part in addressing a complex, multi-factorial problem like obesity.

Parker says, “the NOPS regrettably ignores industry efforts to reduce sugar, of which are corroborated by recent peer-reviewed research in the journal [Nutrients](#) which shows a long-term, fundamental shift in Australians’ non-alcoholic drink choices. This shift is a move away from regular sugar drinks, with each Australian over two decades drinking an astonishing 30 per cent less sugar, the equivalent of 32 teaspoons or 127 grams of less sugar per person, per year. In fact, since 2015 sales of low/no sugar drinks have exceeded those of regular sugar drinks and today sales of bottled and packaged water are more than sugar-sweetened carbonated soft drinks.”

The ABCL welcomes partnerships between industry and government to work together in the development and implementation of initiatives that provide consumers with informed choice, such as the Health Star Rating (HSR) system. The ABCL Board ratified its support for the HSR system in 2021 and is encouraging implementation to members.

“The industry seeks ways to support government-led initiatives, but the Strategy fails to recognise that support and indeed existing industry-led initiatives that are working successfully without further regulation being needed. For example, our members are committed to responsible marketing and advertising limits via the [ABCL’s Responsible Marketing and Advertising Pledge](#) and the [Australian Association of National Advertisers \(AANA\) Food and Beverages Advertising Code](#)” said Mr Parker.

Both codes enact marketing and advertising limits to anyone 15 years and over, including through traditional and digital channels.

The Strategy also calls for consideration of economic tools to reduce consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages. Parker noted that “The drinks industry encourages policy makers to look to the precedent set by numerous United Nations forums, conferences and political resolutions, which have repeatedly considered and rejected blunt instruments like taxes. We support contemporary, real world, evidence-based solutions to address the nation’s expanding waistline and ask that existing initiatives be recognised that are making actual headway on sugar reduction, rather than thought bubble ideas from the 1990s being considered to fix a 2022 problem”.

MEDIA ENQUIRIES: Cathy Cook, Head of Corporate Affairs, 0406 399211, cathy@ausbev.org

ABOUT

The Australian Beverages Council Ltd (ABCL) is the peak body representing the non-alcoholic beverage industry. Our Membership comprises of small, medium-sized and large companies. Collectively these companies produce over 95% of the industry’s volume. Our members make a substantial \$7+ billion contribution to the Australian economy each year, and nationally employ over 46,000 people. Every one job in the industry supports 4.9 jobs in the supply chain.