# Act now on warning labels

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Australia and New Zealand Food and Health Ministers responsible for introducing government regulated alcohol pregnancy warning labels have been urged to take action ahead of its meeting in Brisbane today. The Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) says further delay is not acceptable, warning that the December 2013 timeframe for introducing a government-regulated warning label is fast approaching. Almost one year has passed since the decision was made by the Legislative and Governance Forum on Food Regulation (FoFR) to support regulated alcohol pregnancy warning labels and despite receiving repeated assurances from various FoFR members including the Chair, the Hon Catherine King MP, reaffirming that decision, FoFR is still yet to initiate the formal process. FARE Chief Executive Michael Thorn wrote to all FoFR members ahead of today’s meeting demanding that the process for introducing alcohol pregnancy warning labels be put on the agenda, and says the lack of any real progress in the last year is a huge cause for concern. “The time for talking has long passed. We’ve seen no action now for almost a year and there is simply no justification for the delays. We know the next step. Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) must be tasked immediately to start the process for the introduction of alcohol pregnancy warning labels,” Mr Thorn said. The FSANZ process will take a minimum nine months and would need to commence now if FoFR was to meet its original timeframe for introducing mandatory alcohol pregnancy warning labels. The House of Representatives Social Policy and Legal Affairs Committee FASD report handed down last week has placed further pressure on FoFR to act now. The report, FASD: The Hidden Harm, Inquiry into the prevention, diagnosis and management of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders stated that, ‘It is the view of this Committee, informed by experts and the response of the alcohol industry itself, that current regulation and voluntary programs regarding alcohol labelling are not functioning effectively and are unlikely to ever do so given the commercial realities of the alcohol industry’. “FoFR Ministers have indicated their strong support for this measure, we know that it has very strong community support, and now we have a Parliamentary Committee unanimous in their support for the introduction of alcohol pregnancy warning labels. The lights are all green and there is no excuse for the FoFR process to be stalled on the starting line,” Mr Thorn said. The Committee also called on the Commonwealth Government to put alcohol warning labels on the Legislative and Governance Forum on Food Regulation’s December agenda and spelled out strict time frames for their introduction. The Committee said the Commonwealth Government should determine the appropriate format and design of the labels by 1 March 2013, and that the warning labels should be required to be displayed on all alcohol products, advertising and packaging by 1 January 2014. Michael Thorn says the public would be right to question any further delays when the evidence and support for the introduction of mandatory alcohol pregnancy warning labels is so overwhelming, and says it is no surprise that the FASD Committee was so damning of the alcohol industry’s voluntary efforts. “The alcohol industry’s current near-invisible consumer information labels are all the evidence one needs to see that the alcohol industry must not be given responsibility for such a crucial public health initiative,” Mr Thorn said.

### Metadata