



**National Council of
Women of New Zealand**

Te Kaunihera
Wahine O Aotearoa

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**Submission to the New Zealand Food Safety Authority on
Reducing Neural Tube Defect in New Zealand**

The National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) is an umbrella organisation representing 41 nationally organised societies. It has 33 branches throughout the country attended by representatives of those societies and some 150 other societies. The Council's function is to serve women, the family and the community at local, national and international levels through research, study, discussion and action. NCWNZ has a longstanding history of encouraging the promotion of social and health issues, particularly as they affect women.

The National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) has a long history of interest in the above issue and the Consumer Affairs Standing Committee of NCWNZ made a submission on this issue in 1999. It is with much interest that this Committee has reviewed this proposal.

While acknowledging the need to increase the intake of folic acid/folate by women planning a pregnancy and by pregnant women in New Zealand, the Committee expresses concern regarding historical information provided in the proposal regarding high dosage of folic acid/folate on the health of children and elderly people.

Due to the increasing aging population in New Zealand, and the subsequent increase in health services required by that age group, it is considered that the risk of adding yet another health issue for them should merit serious consideration.

The Committee also expresses concern about the risks to children from the addition of folate to bread and cereals - food considered staple components of many New Zealand children's diets, and particularly so for families from lower socio-economic groups.

Until adequate safety measures are found to protect these two sections of the New Zealand community, the Committee believes that the *status quo* regarding additives should be maintained.

The Committee strongly supports an increased education campaign to ensure all young women are aware of the needs to increase their folic acid intakes prior to and during pregnancy, and this, the Committee suggests, will help to ensure that women who are not involved with a health professional until well advanced in their pregnancy are informed.

The National Council of Women of New Zealand thanks you for the opportunity to discuss and make a submission on this important issue for the women of New Zealand, and will be interested in the outcomes from this consultation document.

Beryl Anderson
National President

Eileen Imlach
Convener, Consumer Affairs Committee

