



For Immediate Release

## **HKRMA clears up misconceptions on amendment to nutrition labelling scheme**

*More than 400,000 consumers support the amended regulation*

(23 May 2008, Hong Kong) The Hong Kong Retail Management Association (“HKRMA”) today clarified misconceptions that have been reported concerning the amendment to the Government’s nutrition labelling scheme on which legislators will vote next Wednesday (28 May 2008).

In the amended regulation, included within the small volume exemption are products selling less than 30,000 units per year that make nutrition claims, such as “low fat”, “cholesterol-free”, “low sodium”, and “sugar-free”.

According to The Taskforce on Food Nutrient Labelling, the amendment to include products that make nutrition claims within the small volume exemption would jeopardise the health of children and patients with chronic illnesses.

Mr Thomas Woo of the HKRMA strongly refutes the misleading information put out by the Taskforce, saying “The amendment, which has the written support of more than 400,000 consumers, will help ensure that healthier products remain on shelves. All of these healthier products are already extensively and accurately labelled according to the laws of the countries where they originate. If “low fat”, “cholesterol-free”, “low sodium”, and “sugar-free” products are driven off shelves, they would be replaced by products that contain higher levels of fat, cholesterol, sodium, and sugar.

“It is clearly not in the interests of consumers, including those with heart disease and diabetes, to be deprived of access to food products that contain less or no fat,



cholesterol, sodium or sugar and that is why we support the Government's amended proposal.”

About 65,000 pre-packaged food items are sold in Hong Kong supermarkets, of which approximately 15,000 make nutrition claims. The overwhelming majority of food products that make nutrition claims sell fewer than 30,000 units per year.

These healthier products are primarily manufactured in the USA, Japan, Australia, and Europe, all of which have mandatory labelling for products with nutrition claims. Furthermore, consumers are already protected from products that make false or misleading claims. Under section 61 of the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap 132), it is an offence to sell food with a label which “(a) falsely describes the food or drug; or (b) is calculated to mislead as to its nature, substance or quality”.

“Hong Kong imports more than 90% of its pre-packaged food and overseas manufacturers of small volume food products that make nutrition claims will not test and re-label products specifically for the Hong Kong market,” added Mr. Woo. “This was recognized by the Government when it provided the small volume exemption. Without the proposed amendment, however, up to 15,000 healthier products could disappear from Hong Kong supermarket shelves.”

### **Are 15,000 products really affected?**

The HKRMA has estimated that there are approximately 65,000 SKUs (Stock Keeping Units) on sale in Hong Kong. Only 10% of products in standard supermarkets make nutrition claims, with the maximum rate of 35% used for niche stores (high volume products that make nutrition claims were not included in the HKRMA's estimates). On a blended average basis, 23% of pre-packaged food items are products that make nutrition claims – giving a total of 15,000 items.

This figure is actually more conservative than the one reported in the Government's



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2005 Regulatory Impact Assessment, which concluded that “more than a quarter” of pre-packaged food items carry a nutrient claim. Additionally, the number of products with nutrient claims has been growing since 2005.

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**For further enquiries, please contact:**

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