**Scientific Interpretive Summary**

**Levels of Iodine in New Zealand Retail Salt**

Iodine is an essential nutrient for growth and development however scientific studies have indicated that the iodine status of New Zealanders has declined to the point where population wide iodine deficiency is re-emerging. The New Zealand Government is addressing this problem through a variety of measures including regulating via food standards the replacement of non-iodised salt with iodised salt in most bread, thereby fortifying bread with iodine. This action came into effect on 27 September 2009. NZFSA is now periodically monitoring iodine levels in food and will use this information to estimate how much iodine New Zealanders are ingesting in their diet.

The fortification of bread with iodine will be inadequate to completely restore iodine status in the whole population. As such, consumers are encouraged to choose from a range of other food sources that contain iodine. While New Zealanders are generally recommended to reduce salt intake, iodised salt will provide some increase in iodine in the diet. NZFSA is also aware of a range of non-iodised retail salts on the New Zealand market that purport to contain iodine, but it is unclear how much iodine is actually present, particularly compared to iodised salt.

To provide information on iodine levels being ingested by New Zealanders in salt products and to provide information to consumers, the NZFSA Science Group commissioned a report from ESR to evaluate a range of iodised and non-iodised salt products available for purchase through New Zealand retail outlets. The report examined the iodine content of 20 different salt products including:

• Iodised salt (six products)

• Non-iodised sea salt (nine products)

• Non-iodised rock salt (four products), and

• Non-iodised low-sodium salt (one product).

The results showed that the amount of iodine for the six iodised products on average ranged from 32 - 64 milligrams per kilogram of salt. The 14 non-iodised sea, rock and low-sodium products ranged from 1 - 5 milligrams per kilogram of salt. There was less variability in the amount of iodine between different batches of the same iodised product (8 - 38%) compared to the non-iodised products (2 - 127%).

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