



Madrid, 19 September 2011

**Addressee/Destino/  
Destinatario/Destinatario** E-mail: Selma.Doyran@fao.org

**For/A la atención de/  
A l'attention de/  
Alla cortese attenzione** Ms Selma H. Doyran  
Senior Officer  
Joint FAO/WHO Standards Programme FAO  
00100 ROME

**From/De/Da parte** International Olive Council - MADRID

**Ref./Réf./Rif.** T.15/

Dear Ms Doyran,

As the Executive Secretariat of the International Olive Council (IOC) we are addressing this letter to you in connection with the recent publication of the *Olive oils and olive pomace oils Australian Standard* (copy attached).

We would like to begin by saying that although Australia is not an official Member of the IOC, which is recognised to be the leading intergovernmental organisation in all aspects of olive oil and table olives, it does take part in the activities of the Organisation and is kept permanently informed about its work.

One of the most significant regulatory tasks of the IOC laid down in the *General Objectives* of the International Agreement on Olive Oil and Table Olives, 2005 (article 1(2)) is to develop the definitions and analytical characteristics of all the grades of olive oils and olive-pomace oils included in the trade standards adopted by Members for compulsory application in international trade.

The standards drawn up by the IOC are trade standards. They are adopted by consensus of the Members, which pledge to incorporate them into their legislation. According to article 22(1) of the International Agreement, headed *Undertakings by Members*, the Members of the International Olive Council undertake to apply the designations prescribed in Annexes B and C of the Agreement in their international trade and to encourage their application in their internal trade. In addition, article 22(2) states that the Council of Members shall determine quality criteria standards applicable to the international trade of the Members.

Revision of IOC standards takes place in the light of scientific advances that help to make testing methods more accurate, or of technological and commercial developments. The aims of these rules are manifold: firstly, to enhance and control quality, but additionally to ensure transparency on the international market for olive oils, olive-pomace oils and table olives, and to promote their consumption.

Every year the IOC assembles groups of chemistry experts and sensory analysts from a range of countries, including Australia, to study and, if necessary, revise the testing methods to determine the quality and control the purity of olive oils and olive-pomace oils. Methods are constantly being improved to adapt them to industry needs and technological developments. Also, two laboratories and one tasting panel from Australia participate in the yearly check tests held by the Executive Secretariat under the IOC proficiency recognition scheme.



INTERNATIONAL  
OLIVE  
COUNCIL

CONSEJO  
OLEICOLA  
INTERNACIONAL

CONSEIL  
OLEICOLE  
INTERNATIONAL

CONSIGLIO  
OLEICOLO  
INTERNAZIONALE

المجلس  
الدولي  
للزيتون

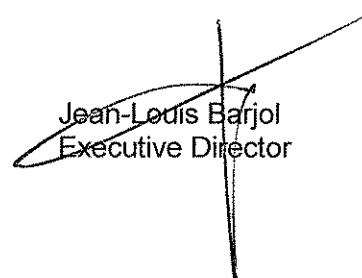
Ever since it first started to be involved in the standardisation of olive products, the IOC has cultivated a solid cooperative relationship with the Codex Alimentarius Commission. Its aim in doing so is to define the minimum compositional, quality and purity requirements of olive oils and to harmonise the methods of analysis in use. The Codex standards for olive oils and table olives have been revised to bring them into line with the IOC trade standards, and all the producing countries that participate in IOC work are aware of the enormous efforts made to bring about this harmonisation.

Recently, in response to an issue raised by Australia and other producing countries concerning the linolenic acid (C18:3) and campesterol content of olive oils, the IOC Council of Members considered it important to study the composition of olive oils produced from autochthonous varieties that give parameters lying outside the limits specified in the IOC trade standard. This study is being conducted with scientific rigour and is taking painstaking care to select and test samples according to a pre-established protocol in order to gain an insight into the situation and to found a satisfactory solution to this issue. The Executive Secretariat invited Australia to participate in this study and wishes to stress the importance of receiving as many samples as possible in order to assemble a large body of data. It feels it is important for this matter, like other similar questions raised by other producing countries, to be discussed within the IOC. The ultimate aim is to facilitate international trading by ensuring that all countries work with the same standards.

The reason we are writing is to convey our concern to the Secretariat of the Codex Alimentarius Commission over the recent adoption of the Australian standard mentioned at the beginning of our letter. The source of this concern is the existence of certain discrepancies vis-à-vis the Codex standard which could hinder international trade due to the application of methods and limits not specified in international standards (determination of pyropheophytins and diglycerides) and in some cases could jeopardise product authenticity on raising the limits for certain purity parameters such as campesterol without establishing other restrictive parameters. We also believe it is important to draw your attention to certain differences in product designations that might pose difficulties to trade and confuse consumers by calling the same product by different names.

We would be grateful to hear the opinion of the Secretariat of the Codex Alimentarius Commission on this matter and on any action it might be able to take to help the IOC in its drive to prevent unfair trading practices or potential trade barriers, to achieve more transparent trading, to combat fraud and to protect consumers through the harmonisation and fulfilment of the international standards.

Yours sincerely,

  
Jean-Louis Barjol  
Executive Director



No. T.20/

### NOTE VERBALE

The Executive Secretariat of the International Olive Council (IOC) presents its compliments to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and has the honour to refer to the recent publication of the *Olive oils and olive pomace oils Australian Standard*. The Executive Secretariat wishes to point out that although Australia is not an official member of the IOC, which is recognised to be the leading UN intergovernmental organisation in all aspects of olive oil and table olives, it does take part in the activities of the Organisation and is kept permanently informed about its work.

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**MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FORESTRY  
CANBERRA**



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In addition, the Executive Secretariat wishes to point out that some time ago it was considered necessary to put in place a self-regulatory scheme where exporters, importers and distributors of olive oil and olive-pomace oil would be required to adhere to IOC standards in order to help achieve orderly market development and fair trading. Consequently, since 1991 the IOC has been implementing a scheme for the quality control of the olive oils and olive-pomace oils sold in Australia under an agreement signed with associations to undertake product quality control at recognised laboratories using updated methods of analysis and taking into account the designations and quality criteria specified in the IOC standards.

The fact that an organisation like the IOC coordinates this quality control scheme is essential in ensuring compliance with rules and regulations and in preventing potential fraud in compliance with the general objectives set out in chapter 1, article 1 of the International Agreement on Olive Oil and Table Olives.



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In view of the above, the Executive Secretariat respectfully seeks the collaboration of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry to help the IOC to prevent unfair trading practices or potential trade barriers, to achieve more transparent trading, to combat fraud and to protect consumers through the harmonisation and fulfilment of the international standards.

The Executive Secretariat of the International Olive Council thanks the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry for the action taken on this Note Verbale and avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Ministry the assurances of its high consideration.

Madrid, 12 September 2011





No. T.20/

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Standards Australia  
Mr. Colin Blair  
Chief Executive Officer



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In view of the above, the Executive Secretariat wishes to express its concern over the recent adoption of the Australian standard. The source of this unease is the existence of certain discrepancies vis-à-vis the Codex standard as regards the application of methods and limits not specified in international standards (determination of pyropheophytins and diglycerides), higher limits for certain purity parameters such as campesterol without concurrent restrictive parameters and differences in product designations.

The Executive Secretariat would welcome official feedback from Standards Australia with regard to the above concerns, which are prompted solely by the IOC's aim to prevent unfair trading practices or potential trade barriers, to achieve more transparent trading, to combat fraud and to protect consumers through the harmonisation and fulfilment of the international standards.

The Executive Secretariat of the International Olive Council thanks Standards Australia for the attention paid to this Note Verbale and avails itself of this opportunity to renew to it the assurances of its high consideration.

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