

FOOD MISLABELLING IN JAPAN AND THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE

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Executive Summary

1. A series of food mislabelling scandals in 2013 revealed that even prestigious restaurants and retailers in Japan also exaggerate the quality of their food. While food mislabelling is not unique to Japan, the latest incident provoked strong public outcry and demand for tougher rules and more effective governance.
2. Japan has had various regulations prohibiting mislabelling under the Act against Unjustifiable Premiums and Misleading Representations (AUPMR) first introduced in 1962. The series of food mislabelling scandals in recent years indicate that the existing framework had not worked effectively.
3. In response, the government set up a special committee in 2013 to investigate the problem and to propose regulatory changes. The committee advised that the government provide detailed guidance to food businesses on their legal obligations to the labelling of food.
4. Second, the committee recommended revising the AUPMR to streamline investigative penalising process and improve efficiency. The government has subsequently reorganised the administrative system for food mislabelling surveillance.
5. In 2014, the government proposed a bill to introduce a surcharge system for entities found to have mislabelled a food item under the AUPRM framework, which was passed by the legislature and will be effective in the spring of 2016.
6. In addition, the government introduced a new system for nutrition labelling to support consumers' food choices, which came into effect in April 2015.
7. The Consumer Affairs Agency (CAA) established in 2008 is now developing a new and systematic approach to improve food labelling. Under the leadership of the CAA, the Food Labelling Act, a comprehensive legal framework for compulsory food labelling, was drafted in June 2013 and came into effect in April 2015.

8. It is still too early to assess if the measures taken are effective. Further monitoring of the recently introduced food labelling systems is needed.