

HEAD OFFICE

4 Camavon Street
Private Mail Bag
GPO, Suva
Phone - General Office: 3300792, 3310183
Chief Executive Officer: 3305864
Fax: 3300115 | Email: complaints@consumersfiji.org

LAUTOKA/West

Suite 4 Popular Building
Vidilo Street
PO Box 5396, Lautoka
Phone: 6664987 | Fax: 6652846
Email: consumerlwk@connect.com.fj

LABASA/North

Level 1, Lot 41 Raza Properties Ltd
Nasekula Road
PO Box 64, Labasa
Phone: 8812559 | Fax: 8812559
Email: colbs@connect.com.fj

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PRESS RELEASE

Council clears facts on re-labeled tinned fish

J Santa Ram (Stores) Limited had not taken initial responsibility over its dual-labeled Reshma Gold Mackerel, a product that has been under the scrutiny of regulatory authorities in the past months.

J Santa Ram had put out a public notice in the *Fiji Times* today (18 February 2011, p.41) whereby the company has sought to justify actions it has taken on the re-labeled tin fish. The company claims in the notice as a fact that it "...wrote to the Consumer Council of Fiji and informed them of dual labeling..." The Consumer Council wishes to set the record straight that the product was already on the shelves and communication with the company only started after we received complaints from consumers. J Santa Ram never initiated any correspondence with the Consumer Council, but only responded after we received complaints from consumers. So the company had already distributed the product in the market knowing very well that the re-label did not comply with the Food Safety Act/Food Regulations 2009.

Instead of seeking the advice of the Consumer Council or even the Food Unit of the Ministry of Health, J Santa Ram went ahead and distributed its re-labeled Reshma Gold Mackerel. The problem only came to the fore following complaints from concerned consumers who had noticed the double-labeling.

The Council does not dispute the fact that there was a meeting on the issue with Food Unit officials and representatives of J Santa Ram in December 2010, and that we were assured the re-labeled batches would be off the shelves. We also acknowledge the fact the J Santa Ram had taken steps to inform customers to return the re-labeled batches and get a refund or exchange for new stock. However, the Council is very concerned that J Santa Ram had not sought our advice or that of the Food Unit before distributing the product in the market.

J Santa Ram and other food suppliers should be now well versed with the Food Safety Act/Food Safety Regulations 2009 as more than a year has lapsed since the regulations came into full force. The company (and other food companies) should take responsibility for its products and seek advice from the regulators if they are not sure before distributing in the market.

The Council is also reminding food importers and manufacturers that an increasing number of consumers are becoming aware of their rights and knowledgeable about regulations pertaining to food.



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Premila Kumar

Chief Executive Officer, Consumer Council of Fiji