**Author’s response to reviews**

**Title:** Measuring and stimulating progress on implementing widely recommended food environment policies: The New Zealand case study

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**Author’s response to reviews:**

Reviewer #1:

The manuscript describes the process of using the Food-EPI to assess degree of implementation of food environment policies in New Zealand, including a comparison to 2014 data. The manuscript is important in its field as it addresses the difficulty of assessing policy implementation and provides recommendations for action. The paper is well written and I have only minor comments for the authors.

Answer from the authors: Thank you very much

- It is unclear to me what 'international best practices' were used or how that list was composed. Are they part of the Food-EPI or drawn from the Benchmarking food environments 2017, or something else?

Answer from the authors: We agree we should have clarified this further. We have now created a separate section on “International best practice exemplars (benchmarks)” in the methods section rather than having it under “Evidence compilation and verification”. The international best practice exemplars or benchmarks are part of the Food-EPI but they may change over time if countries implement stronger and more comprehensive policies. We have included some actual examples in the text to clarify this further (lines 119-125): “Benchmark policies include the 10% soda and 8% junk food taxes recently implemented in Mexico, comprehensive restrictions on unhealthy food marketing to children in Chile, sodium targets in a range of food product categories specified by law in Argentina and South Africa and the nutrient profiling system to prevent unhealthy food products carrying health claims in Australia and New Zealand.”

- In the methods section (p4-5) the authors explain that 3 groups of participants were recruited (i.e. public health experts, public health non-governmental organizations, and government experts), whilst in the results section only the distinction between independent and government is made. Please explain.
Answer from the authors: There are actually only two main groups considered in this study, one group are the public health experts, composed of public health experts including both academics and representatives from NGOs and other organizations, and the other group are government experts. It has now been clarified in the methods section that there are these 2 groups: independent and government experts (lines 97-101).

- Results section p10, line 235-245 provides a list of who would be responsible for the listed actions. What data is this based on? And would it be better suited in the discussion section?

Answer from the authors: This is not really based on any actual data but on who (i.e. which department) has the jurisdiction to implement the different recommended policy actions in New Zealand. So in other words, which Government department would be responsible for implementing the recommended actions? We agree however that this fits better in the discussion section and we have now moved this paragraph to the discussion section (lines 287-297).

- Use of scientific publications in the reference list is limited. This is also reflected in the discussion section> the discussion section now mainly repeats results. The manuscript would benefit from comparison with other scientific literature in the discussion section, as well as comparison with Food-EPI scores from other countries (beyond Australia).

Answer from the authors: Thanks for this comment. We do feel it is important to discuss the New Zealand results at the start of the discussion. We have included comparisons with Australia since this is our neighbouring country. Also, while 10 countries have actually implemented the Food-EPI, most of this is not (yet) published. We have added reference to the Thai Food-EPI in the discussion which was previously published. In addition, we have added an extra paragraph on how the Food-EPI is an advancement in this field (lines 314-323): “The Food-EPI provides a useful set of indicators focusing on where government actions are needed most and the process involves a wide range of stakeholders. Experts evaluated the tool and process as valuable and with potential to stimulate government action in New Zealand. The Food-EPI is currently being implemented by over 10 countries globally, including some big countries like the UK [18] and Australia [31], and wider uptake will allow to benchmark food environment policy implementation globally. This will be useful for the Decade of Action on Nutrition [32] which stimulates governments to make SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-Bound) commitments on nutrition. It is anticipated that benchmarking the extent of implementation of government policies will increase accountability of governments for their actions on food environments [6].”

- Ref 14 is listed as in press, whilst 2014 is noted as publication year. Is this correct?

Answer from the authors: This is a mistake. This paper has been published and the reference has been updated to the following: Vandevijvere S, Swinburn B, For INFORMAS: Pilot test of the Healthy Food Environment Policy Index (Food-EPI) to increase government actions for creating healthy food environments. BMJ open 2015, 5(1):e006194.
Ref 20 refers to a Google drive document. Will this link keep on working in the future? And how much overlap is there between the ref 20 report and this paper?

Answer from the authors: The link will keep on working in the future. The report is really tailored to government officials in New Zealand with the aim to present a comprehensive policy package supported by a wide range of stakeholders. The audience for the paper is very different. It is important to publish this paper for the tool and process to get wider uptake and for more research groups/countries to implement the Food-EPI tool and process. This will then allow for benchmarking of food environment policy implementation across countries globally.

Could the authors elaborate on what implementation actions are planned for the top priorities as listed in Table 1? Or was that not part of this project?

Answer from the authors: The actual implementation of those priority policies and actions is up to the Government. We, as researchers and experts, can only recommend what is needed and stimulate the Government to take the Food-EPI recommendations on board. That said, for some of the priority actions, activities are planned (e.g. a comprehensive review of the Health Star Rating system) but we just have a new Government in office and they have not really announced their plans yet in terms of obesity prevention policy. This will become clearer in the near future. While the previous Government was not supportive of a tax on sugary drinks for example, the new health Minister has recently said that all options are on the table. But we prefer not to add anything in relation to this to the manuscript as future actions of the current Government are still unclear.

Supplement 2 uses a lot of abbreviations that are not explained in the document.

Answer from the authors: Thanks for this comment. We have now added the abbreviations list at the end of the document or for abbreviations that only appear once we have written them in full instead.

Reviewer #2:

This paper reports on the outcome of a 2017 national panel of independent and government experts in New Zealand tasked with reviewing progress toward meeting food environment policy goals. The paper emphasises tabulations of results from the panel, aggregating expert opinion in New Zealand both with respect to current success in meeting policy goals and to progress since the previous panel had convened (in 2014). But it seems to me that the authors “bury the lead” by limiting discussion of some of the larger context and policy-relevant findings. “Almost all” of the 71 experts who participated in the panel(s) reported that the exercise increased their knowledge about food environments and policies, and agreed that the Food-EPI is likely to contribute to beneficial policy change. That an exercise like the one described in this study could help to generate a common agenda in the public policy community in a country the size of New Zealand, which has a current population of around 4.5 million people. But what would this exercise look like if it were scaled up across the OECD? In countries (or U.S. states) with larger populations (and, presumably, correspondingly larger public policy-making apparatuses), what
would it take to empanel a group of experts proportionally equivalent to 71 leaders in New Zealand. The Food-EPI is useful because it provides international context to local/national decisions, and thus is presumably untainted by local political influence. I would encourage the authors to give some thought to how the New Zealand experience with this exercise might be replicated, and held up as an international best practice in its own right.

Answer from the authors: Thanks for this comment. New Zealand is the first country who has implemented the Food-EPI twice, once in 2014 and once in 2017, and launched the report before the upcoming elections. There are about 10 other countries who implemented the Food-EPI tool and process recently, but to date only the results from Australia, UK and Thailand have been published while the others are underway. And ten more countries (Europe, Africa) have planned to implement the tool and process in the near future. So even in a large country like Australia, it is possible to do this exercise and have experts in the different states evaluate their state’s extent of implementation as well as the federal government’s extent of implementation of food environment policies.

So if taken up by a large number of countries, the Food-EPI allows benchmarking in 2 different ways: At the country level, a government’s policies are compared against international best practice for each of the indicators, but then the level of implementation of different policies compared to international best practice can also be compared between countries. This work feeds nicely into the Decade of Action on Nutrition where countries are stimulated to make SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time Bound) commitments.

We have added the following paragraph in the discussion to reflect on the potential of the Food-EPI tool and process: “The Food-EPI provides a useful set of indicators focusing on where government actions are needed most and the process involves a wide range of stakeholders. Experts evaluated the tool and process as valuable and with potential to stimulate government action in New Zealand. The Food-EPI is currently being implemented by over 10 countries globally, including some big countries like the UK [18] and Australia [31], and wider uptake will allow to benchmark food environment policy implementation globally. This will be useful for the Decade of Action on Nutrition [32] which stimulates governments to make SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-Bound) commitments on nutrition. It is anticipated that benchmarking the extent of implementation of government policies will increase accountability of governments for their actions on food environments [6].”