



Australian Public Health Nutrition Academic Collaboration

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The Hon Kevin Rudd MP Prime Minister

7th December 2007

PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister

Congratulations on your recent electoral win and formation of a new Australian government. The beginning of a new government signals exciting times of new policy and programs, and of new governance arrangements. It is also a time to reflect on policy commitments made and priorities for action. Public health nutrition, within the context of climate change and rising food prices, is one such priority policy agenda.

The key public health nutrition associations of Australia call on the new **Australian government to set up as a matter of urgency:**

1. **A national enquiry into food prices**, including an examination of supermarket retail concentration, as promised in the lead up to the recent federal election.
2. **A cabinet-led enquiry into the sustainability of the Australian food supply**, the impact of climate change on food production and the implications for the health of all Australians.

At the recent national conference, *Public Health Nutrition - New Directions New Priorities* in Brisbane, 29th & 30th November 2007, public health nutritionists discussed the impact of climate change on food prices, food production and food security. This meeting recognised that:

1. Food prices are in crisis.

- There is clear evidence that food prices have been increasing.
- Food price increases are due to the drought, rising fuel prices, retailer price setting and changing environmental conditions. Other factors also contribute to increase in the retail price of food.
- The greatest impact has been on fresh foods and other foods essential for health. Working families and those with little social protection are feeling the stresses of affordability and availability of food.

The Queensland Healthy Food Access Basket surveys have shown that the average price of a basket of basic healthy foods has risen 49% over six years compared with a 32.5% increase in the Consumer Price Index for food over the same period; the same basket of food purchased for \$304 in 2000 now costs Queensland families an average of \$453. Recent published research undertaken in Adelaide shows that the cost of a healthy basket of food represents one third of average household income, putting it far beyond the reach of many working families.

2. The current Australian food supply is unsustainable

- Food trade, production, distribution and consumption contribute to climate change and climate change will have major effects on each of these factors.
- Water, oil and arable land are critical to food production but supplies of these three elements are being rapidly depleted.
- Food is responsible for one third of our greenhouse gas emissions and a large proportion of our water use.

"In Australia, the agriculture sector accounted for just under 60 per cent of total methane emissions, 84 per cent of total nitrous oxide emissions and 17 per cent of overall greenhouse gas emissions in 2005".

"irrigated agricultural production in the [Murray Darling Basin] is estimated to fall by around 25 per cent... The greatest reduction in output is estimated to occur in perennial horticultural crops such as grapes, citrus and stonefruits." (ABARE 2007)

It is critical that the Australian government ensures all Australians have a safe and affordable food supply that supports equitable health and well-being and does no further damage to the planet. It is essential that health equity be a core component of the climate change debate.

A healthy, well-nourished population, supported by a sustainable food supply, is vital to the economic future of Australia and its cultural and social strength. Progress in addressing these critical issues of food, health and the environment, thus ensuring a food-secure Australia, will be a key measure of successful leadership of our country.

We hope very much that you will share our concerns about the importance of these pressing issues and would greatly appreciate the opportunity to meet you to discuss them. Please contact A/Professor Heather Yeatman – 0409 849 679 with any questions or to arrange a meeting.

Yours faithfully

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On behalf of:

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President, Public Health
Association of Australia



A/Professor Peter Davies

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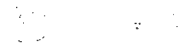
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