



CLIMATE^{AND}
HEALTH
ALLIANCE

**Submission to the
National Food Plan Green Paper
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About the Climate and Health Alliance

The Climate and Health Alliance (CAHA) is a not for profit organisation and a national alliance of organisations and people in the health sector who work together to raise awareness about the health risks of climate change and the health benefits of emissions reductions.

CAHA's members recognise that health care stakeholders have a particular responsibility to the community in advocating for public policy that will promote and protect human health.

The membership of the Climate and Health Alliance includes a broad cross section of the health sector with 26 organisational members, representing health professionals from a range of disciplines, health care service providers, institutions, academics, researchers, and consumers.

For more information about the membership and governance of the Climate and Health Alliance, please see Appendix A. For further information see www.caha.org.au.

Overview

The Climate and Health Alliance welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Development of the Australian Government's National Food Plan 2012.

The Climate and Health Alliance believes that the most pressing issues in the Australian community are those which affect people's health and wellbeing. These include climate change, natural disasters, environmental degradation, equity and access for vulnerable populations, obesity, chronic diseases, Indigenous disadvantage, and mental health in rural communities, all of which are either directly or indirectly related to Australia's food policies, and therefore an essential consideration in Australia's National Food Plan.

The Climate and Health Alliance is concerned that the National Food Plan overlooks important considerations in relation to: climate change impacts; impacts of environmental constraints on food production in Australia, including on the availability of natural resources, such as oil and water; and the public interest perspective, particularly in the profoundly important considerations for health and wellbeing and equity (such as access to fresh, affordable and quality food).

We believe that the National Food Plan should identify and address the critical issues facing Australian communities in relation to food production, processing, distribution, access and disposal, and recognise the importance to the Australian public of regional and local food systems.

The Climate and Health Alliance urges the Australian Government to consider these issues in the next iteration of the National Good Plan.

Key points

The Climate and Health Alliance proposes the following priority issues for consideration in the development of the National Food Plan to ensure the long term health and wellbeing of communities:

- A plan that acts in the public interest
- Consideration of climate change impacts
- Reduces emissions in all aspects of food production, including disposal
- Assists with climate change adaptation
- Decreases reliance on fossil fuels
- Improves access to healthy, safe, sustainable affordable food
- Ensures food security for Indigenous people in remote communities
- Protects vulnerable environments and ecosystems
- Promotes sustainable land use

A plan that acts in the public interest

While we acknowledge the importance of agriculture and business to the National Food Plan, the government has an overwhelming responsibility to act in the public interest when it considers the major food challenges facing society, and to address them strategically in a long term plan that recognises the significant body of Australian and international research on food policy and food security. Community wellbeing has environmental, economic, and social determinants which should be foundational considerations in the National Food Plan. That is, a National Food Plan should provide guidelines about how to improve environmental health (e.g. address climate change, environmental degradation), reduce economic burdens (e.g. address rising food prices, socio-economic disruptions) and improve social wellbeing (e.g. increase cohesion in farming communities, promote equity and access to healthy food).

Many of these critical issues are unfortunately not well addressed in the National Food Plan Green Paper. The narrow focus of the Green Plan on agri-business, market opportunities and economic growth fails to address the most pressing issues facing Australians in the 21st century - climate change and the associated environmental, economic and psychosocial impacts on farming, rural communities, the food industry, and the health and wellbeing of all Australians.

The development of the National Food Plan provides an important opportunity to addressing Australia's growing obesity epidemic, and as such must outline measures to improve the availability and affordability of fresh, healthy, safe, sustainable food. This should include measures to reduce the accessibility of high fat, poor quality food (especially in lower socioeconomic communities) through regulations such as food labelling and prevention of inappropriate advertising as these are key to better public health outcomes.

Consideration of climate change impacts

Recent reports state unequivocally that climate change is real, already happening, and that human activities including the burning of fossil fuels are the cause (IPCC, 2011). Climate change poses an immediate, growing and grave threat to the health and security of people around the world, as well as in Australia, which is regarded as the most vulnerable of all of

the developed countries (Garnaut, 2011). There is an urgent need to reduce carbon emissions to as close to zero as possible, prevent further warming, and restore global temperatures to a safe level.

Climate change impacts do not just threaten people in far-away places. In Australia, recent reports outline significant current and future threats across the population (e.g., Hughes & d McMichael, 2011) including threats directly related to food production and distribution.

The Australian agricultural industry is highly vulnerable to climate change. Higher temperatures, increased variability in rainfall patterns, (predicted to result in increased precipitation in wet tropics and decrease in most arid or semi-arid areas – IPCC 2007), and increased frequency of extreme droughts, bushfires and flooding are some of the expected changes. These are predicted to have negative impacts on the amount of produce, quality of produce, reliability of production and on the natural resource base on which agriculture depends (CSIRO, 2008). These impacts have flow-on effects on farmers and farming communities, in the form of decreased production, loss of income, failing farms, and declining rural communities. Further psychosocial and mental health consequences flow from these impacts including displacement and dislocation from community, financial and relationship stress, multiple losses, increased risks of depression, anxiety-related disorders, grief and substance use disorders (Fritze et al., 2008), and even suicide (Garnaut, 2008).

Because of the direct and indirect impacts of climate change on the food industry, a national food plan must therefore address climate change and climate change impacts in two major ways – through mitigation to reduce its own contribution to climate change (primarily through reducing carbon emissions), and through adaptation measures to build resilience in farming communities, the food industry, and the wider community, to protect people from the worst of the negative impacts of climate change.

Reducing emissions in all aspects of food production

The farming/food industry contributes a sizeable proportion of Australia's overall carbon emissions. It is a prolific consumer of fossil fuels and producer of poisonous wastes at all levels of food production, from growing, processing and manufacturing, to packaging, distribution, transportation, storage, preparation and disposal. Our increasing demands for processed and packaged food, year-round supply and just-in-time delivery multiply these energy requirements and make our current food system unsustainable. Greenhouse gas emissions from the agricultural sector account for about 22% of global total emissions (equal to industry, and greater than transport). Australia's per capita emissions arising from agriculture are more than six times the world average, more than four times the OECD average, and third highest in the OECD (Garnaut, 2011).

Australia's national food plan must, therefore, prioritise emissions reductions in all aspects of food production, processing, transportation etc. Reduction in emissions should include carbon dioxide, nitrogen, and methane. Different production and transport systems have substantially different environmental consequences and carry different amounts of embodied energy and water (the amount of energy and water expended in producing a food). Livestock emissions from enteric fermentation play a large role in the emissions profile of the agriculture sector. About 66% of Australia's agricultural emissions are due to livestock

emissions (primarily from cattle and sheep). Livestock production accounts for more than 80% of the sector's emissions (McMichael et al. 2007).

Reductions in red meat consumption in Australia from the (current) average of 100g to 50g per person per day have been estimated to reduce annual emissions from livestock by 13.3 MtCO₂-e (about 22 per cent) (Friel, 2010). (Importantly, reduction in animal product consumption also have direct human health benefits as well, such as a reduction in the incidence of colorectal cancer by 11 per cent, and a reduction in the burden of ischaemic heart disease (Friel, 2010) (in Armstrong, 2012, *Our Uncashed Dividend*).

The National Food Plan should aim for reduction in emissions in the following components of the food industry:

Reductions in agricultural emissions from:

- Enteric fermentation in livestock—emissions associated with microbial fermentation during digestion of feed by ruminant (mostly cattle and sheep) and some non-ruminant domestic livestock;
- Manure management—emissions associated with the decomposition of animal wastes while held in manure management systems;
- Rice cultivation—methane emissions from anaerobic decay of plant and other organic material when rice fields are flooded;
- Agricultural soils—emissions associated with the application of fertilisers, crop residues and animal wastes to agricultural lands and the use of biological nitrogen-fixing crops and pastures;
- Prescribed burning of savannas—emissions associated with the burning of tropical savanna and temperate grasslands for pasture management, fuel reduction, and prevention of wildfires;
- Field burning of agricultural residues—emissions from field burning of cereal, sugar cane and crop stubble.

Reduction in emissions from food production, including:

- Increasing use of renewable energy in all aspects of the food industry;
- Reducing packaging, or using recycled packaging;
- Improving labelling of products giving the CO₂ produced in their processing (to allow customers to compare the carbon footprint of food products, and hopefully select the one with the lowest footprint).

Reduction in emissions from transportation (reduction in food miles) through:

- Reducing road transport emissions by increasing the transportation of food in container by rail;
- Reducing air emissions (the biggest emitter of all food transport methods) by facilitating local food production.

Reduction in emissions from food disposal through:

- Measures to discourage waste and disposal of otherwise recyclable products such as paper and cardboard
- Capturing emissions from landfill for energy generation
- Encouraging composting, not disposal, of food waste

Climate change adaptation

The high climate change vulnerability of the Australian agricultural industry requires high levels of adaptive responses.

The National Food Plan must address the need for communities to adapt to both climate change impacts and climate change mitigation policies, such as carbon pricing. Specifically, the National Food Plan should include:

- Active adaptation strategies for agricultural systems;
- Development of an adaptive management approach to enable communities to effectively adjust to ongoing climate changes and uncertainty in climate change projections;
- Support for farmers to adapt to climate change through:
 - Help with transition to low carbon farming
 - Drought proofing rural communities
 - Initiatives to promote community resilience in farming communities

Decreasing reliance on finite fossil fuels

As well as contributing to reduced emissions, decreased reliance on finite fossil fuels is also important as a way of reducing rising costs associated with increasingly expensive fossil fuels. Rising global demands for oil, and declining worldwide production leads to increasing costs of oil, and also therefore products produced from oil like fertilizers. Rising oil prices result in higher costs of food production. As oil companies find it increasingly difficult to meet the demand for oil, food prices will continue to rise to take into account the increasing costs of production and transportation (Akmal & Riwoe, 2005).

Rising food prices disproportionately affect the most vulnerable members of society who struggle to afford healthy food. Reducing the cost impacts of fossil fuel-dependent food industries benefits these communities as well as the small businesses who are most affected by price variations.

The National Food Plan must include measures to reduce Australia's reliance on fossil fuels through:

- Reducing reliance on fossil fuel based fertilisers
- Increasing consumption of locally produced products.
- Increasing efficiency of irrigation systems to reduce fossil fuel use in pumping water
- Increasing support for organic farming methods
- Increasing soil conservation techniques

- Reducing production of processed and packaged foods
- Increasing support for local food production (including increasing land availability, removing legislative barriers)

Improving access to healthy, safe, affordable food for vulnerable people

In Australia, increasing numbers of people are at risk of developing chronic health problems like obesity, with associated increased risks of developing other chronic physical and mental health problems including diabetes, heart disease, stroke, osteoporosis, cancer, and depression. Rates are increasing for both adults and children. Obesity has now overtaken smoking as the leading cause of premature death and illness in Australia. The economic burden of obesity is estimated to be at around 10 percent of total health care costs (<http://www.modi.monash.edu.au/obesity-facts-figures/economic-impact-of-obesity/> and rising. The total cost of obesity to Australian society is estimated to be \$58 billion each year (see *Technical Paper 1: Obesity in Australia*).

The causes of these diseases are a complex combination of genetics, activity levels, diet, and environmental and socio-cultural factors, including socioeconomic status, advertising, the physical environment, and access to food. A number of factors determine what people eat, but **access to healthy food** has a major influence. Studies have found that people buy food that is readily available (eg Galvez 2009), and it is often the case that communities with the highest rates of obesity also are places where residents have few opportunities to conveniently purchase nutritious, affordable food.

The encouragement and support of strong local and regional food production should therefore be an important component of the National Food Plan. Local and regional food systems can help ensure security of supply in the event of natural disasters, such as severe weather events, and can help improve access to healthy and affordable food for communities all year round.

Food access problems that serve as an impediment to healthy eating include:

- The Grocery Gap - low-income areas typically have one-third fewer grocery stores than middle and high-income neighbourhoods. This means that poor people have fewer healthy foods to choose from and pay more for what's available.
- People without access to a car or adequate public transportation face barriers getting to places that sell affordable quality foods.
- People on a tight budget will naturally seek out less expensive foods. Unfortunately cheaper foods are often high in calories and fat.
- Limited time for and knowledge of food preparation can increase consumption of prepackaged or highly processed prepared meals.

The National Food Plan should prioritise the removal of these and other barriers to obtaining healthy, affordable food. Governments also have at their disposal many strategies and policies that can be used to level the food playing field. For example, government policies regarding land use and land tenure and transportation can ultimately determine how easy or hard it will be for residents in different areas to obtain healthy foods. The Food Plan needs to

be a whole-of-government response, prioritising access to safe, affordable and quality food for all people, especially low income communities.

Other options for ensuring healthy foods are accessible include:

- Supporting neighbourhood farmers' markets and community gardens;
- Support for community-based food production systems;
- Attracting supermarket development to under-served areas; and
- Enacting food-centered zoning ordinances.

Many of these strategies have the added attraction of strengthening the local economy, bringing community members together, helping address obesity, and enhancing quality of life for all.

Food security for Indigenous communities in remote areas

There remains a 17 year life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Addressing food security is key to closing this gap and enhancing the health and wellbeing of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The cost of fresh and nutritious food in stores in remote Indigenous communities is consistently found to be significantly higher than that experienced in urban and regional Australia. Food quality in remote Indigenous stores is also often poor and well below the standard found in urban and regional centres. Similarly, food availability is often limited and variable – some communities have periods when they do not have access to any fresh food (House of Reps Inquiry Report, 2009).

It is estimated that up to nineteen per cent of the national Indigenous health gap is attributable to diet-related causes, including low fruit and vegetable intake. In remote areas, 20 per cent of Indigenous people aged 12 years and over reported no usual daily fruit intake and 15 per cent reported no usual daily intake of vegetables (ABS, 2006). Nationally, Indigenous children aged less than four years suffer from nutritional anaemia and malnutrition at 29.6 times the rate for non-Indigenous children (Commonwealth of Australia, 2007).

Improving the supply and consumption of healthy food in remote Indigenous communities is required to reduce the high levels of preventable diet-related chronic disease suffered by Indigenous Australians in these locations, including renal disease, heart disease and diabetes.

The National Food Plan should ensure a secure, sustainable and healthy food supply to remote Indigenous communities

There was a commitment to develop A National Healthy Eating Action Plan for remote Indigenous communities by mid-2010 (Action 4).- <http://www.coag.gov.au/node/92>, but this has not been made public. This plan was to include a strategy to improve food security in remote Indigenous communities, including the following:

- Identification of a best practice model to build demand for healthy food in remote Indigenous communities;

- Increasing the nutrition workforce - nutritionists, community dieticians and advanced health workers (nutrition promotion);
- Developing and supporting the capacity of the Indigenous workforce in these areas to promote healthy eating;
- Identification of a best practice model to improve the supply of healthy food in remote Indigenous communities that focuses on building, training and supporting a sustainable workforce for remote community stores and takeaways, including store managers and store support staff;

The National Food Plan should reflect this strategy and include measures for its realization to ensure Indigenous people living in very remote Australia have access to secure healthy sustainable food to help close the gap with regard to life expectancy, health outcomes and educational attainment. In addition, measures to support economic enterprises of sustainable horticulture on Aboriginal land should be developed in consultation with Indigenous communities.

Protection of vulnerable environments and ecosystems

Agricultural land management greatly affects the environment, including river flows, water quality, habitat, threatened species and specific environmental assets.

The National Food Plan should include plans for the:

- Identification of damaged landscapes and those at risk;
- Implementation of remediation strategies for these areas;
- End to broad-scale native vegetation clearing and, where possible, restoration of native vegetation and biodiversity;
- Measures to enhance the sustainable management of land through the protection of the quality and diversity of all ecosystems on all agricultural land.

Promotion of sustainable land use

There are several long term risks to the environment that come from agricultural management, including land degradation, decreased soil fertility, use of harmful chemicals in the form of pesticides, fertilizers, hormones, antibiotics, which can contaminate water supply leave residue on our food, and expose people to toxic effects.

The National Food Plan should therefore promote sustainable land use and healthy agricultural systems. This should include:

- Promotion of sustainable land use management tools;
- Regulating the use of pesticides and hormones;
- Banning the use of harmful chemicals;
- Enhancing crop diversity and resilience;
- Addressing the critical issue of soil degradation and loss of soil health facing Australian agricultural industries;

- Improving water efficiency, water quality and conservation within agricultural systems;
- Increasing support for research into sustainable agricultural innovations and industries;
- Promoting new sustainable industries, including biofuel and bioenergy production, provided that they do not endanger food security.

10. Conclusion

The Climate and Health Alliance urges the Taskforce responsible for the development of the National Food Plan to consider and address the need to protect and promote health in relation to food quality and security. In doing so, it is vital to consider how the food system contributes to climate change and how the food system must both minimise its contribution to climate change and prepare for its impacts.

The National Food Plan must support the development of healthy sustainable food systems in Australia that ensure equity of access to a nutritious and secure food supply.

The Climate and Health Alliance holds serious concerns with regard to the impact of climate change on food quality, availability and affordability in Australia, and the human health impacts associated with that. The health impacts associated with lack of access to fresh, affordable, available food, including of obesity, as a result of Australia food systems must be considered and addressed in the plan.

The failure to acknowledge these risks on the National Food Plan Green Paper and the emphasis on economic, rather than health, environmental and ecological sustainability is a serious concern.

In summary, the Climate and Health Alliance calls for a National Food Plan that is in the interests of all Australians. It should heed the evidence of climate change and prepare to reduce the contribution of our food system to global emissions and prepare for climate impacts on food production. This requires decreasing our reliance on fossil fuels. The National Food Plan should ensure all Australians, regardless of geographic location or socioeconomic circumstances, have access to healthy, safe, sustainable affordable food.

The National Food Plan must also ensure the protection of vulnerable ecosystems, and promote sustainable land use.

The Climate and Health Alliance urges the National Food Plan Taskforce to carefully consider this submission, the documents it refers to, as well as the submission of CAHA's member, the Food Alliance, in its subsequent iteration of the Plan.

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APPENDIX A

Climate and Health Alliance Committee of Management

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Lance Emerson (Australian Research Council for Children and Youth)
Liz Hanna (Australian College of Nursing)
Bret Hart (Alliance for Future Health)
Ursula King (Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine)
Michael Moore (Public Health Association of Australia)
Elizabeth Reale (Australian Nursing Federation)
Kristine Olaris (Women's Health East)
Julia Stewart (CRANaplus)

CAHA Organisational Members

Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW)
Australian College of Nursing (ACN)
Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM)
Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS)
Australian Hospitals and Healthcare Association (AHHA)
Australian Health Promotion Association (AHPA)
Australian Medical Students Association of Australia (AMSA)
Australian Physiotherapy Association (APA)
Australian Institute of Health Innovation (AIHI)
Australian Women's Health Network (AWHN)
Australian Nursing Federation (ANF)
Australian Psychological Society
Australian Research Council for Children and Youth (ARACY)
Australian Rural Health Education Network (ARHEN)
CRANaplus
Doctors Reform Society (DRS)
Friends of CAHA
Health Consumers' Network (Qld)
Health Issues Centre (HIC)
Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA)
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Women's Health East
Women's Health in the North
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