

INSTITUTE FOR SUSTAINABLE FUTURES

RESPONSE TO AUSTRALIAN DIETARY GUIDELINES REVIEW



2012

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE FOR SUSTAINABLE FUTURES

The Institute for Sustainable Futures (ISF) is part of the University of Technology, Sydney, and was formed in 1997 to work with industry, government and the community on applied research projects that contribute to a sustainable future.

We have an extensive track record in development of educational programs, tools and guidelines that provide our clients and their stakeholders with the capacity to create their own change towards sustainable futures. Our work in this area encompasses community awareness raising, education, public consultation to enhance community involvement, professional development programs and change management programs for private and public sector organisations.

Our researchers have the expertise to assess the economic, environmental and social sustainability of food systems and food and diet initiatives to inform policy and action. We use a variety of tools and frameworks to guide evaluation, including integrated resource planning and sustainability indicators. We have expertise in resource and food flows analysis, including Australian and global food production, consumption and disposal/reuse systems.

Our work in designing and evaluating social change initiatives is renowned; recent projects include the design of household behaviour change measures for the Queensland Premier's Council on Climate Change and the self-developed Climate Clubs behaviour change initiative (www.climateclubs.org.au). We have a strong and growing reputation in the delivery of research and practical solutions for climate change mitigation and adaptation.

We have contributed to research, writing, public speaking and media work in relation to food, diet and sustainability. Some of our recent successes include:

- ISF researchers recently won the prestigious [Mercedes-Benz Australian Environmental Research Award](#) for the project: "*Peak Phosphorus: the next global food crisis?*"
- Our work on Network 10s 'National Carbon Test' television program raised awareness of water and energy issues related to food waste.
- Our researchers have appeared on television programs such as 'Catalyst' (<http://www.abc.net.au/catalyst/food>) and national news media and online publications.

Some examples of our food related projects include:

- **Global Phosphorous Research Initiative**

The Global Phosphorus Research Initiative (GPRI) is a collaboration between independent research institutes in Europe, Australia and North America. The main objective of the GPRI is to facilitate quality interdisciplinary research on global phosphorus security for future food production. In addition to research, the GPRI also facilitates networking, dialogue and awareness-raising among policy makers, industry, scientists and the community on the implications of global phosphorus scarcity and possible solutions.

For further information see www.phosphorusfutures.net

- **Securing a sustainable phosphorus future for Australia for CSIRO Sustainable Agriculture Flagship**

ISF carried out a collaborative project for CSIRO's National Research Flagships Program's Flagship Collaboration Fund. ISF's role was to examine the implications of global phosphorus scarcity for the Australian food system. In addition to policy analysis, this involved developing a flows analysis of the Australian food production and consumption system, from mining and application of mineral fertilizers, through to food consumption and excretion. The analysis also quantified food and organic losses from the Australian food system and their fate (landfill, vs non-arable land vs recovery etc). (2010)

- **NSW Department of Environment Climate Change and Water, Reducing Commercial and Industrial Food Waste: A Literature Review and options:**

ISF undertook a comprehensive review of existing food waste reduction policies and programs both within Australia and internationally, with a specific focus on the commercial and industrial sectors. This review formed the basis for an analysis of existing Australian food waste policies particularly at a state level, noting and discussing existing sources of food waste data or lack thereof and identifying possible long-term data collation strategies such as online databases. In developing food-waste reduction policy recommendations best practice examples were drawn from international experience. (2010)

- **Eating the Earth: How should we eat to ensure a sustainable future?**

Dr Dana Cordell, Dr Rosemary Stanton and Professor Stuart White: What do obesity, factory farming, fair trade, peak oil, peak phosphorus and climate change have in common? Why might our 'pee' one day be worth its weight in gold? With three expert speakers, this lecture aimed to put our daily dinner table and supermarket choices under the spotlight. It questioned the kind of human diet our planet can sustain and looked at how we could reduce demand on global resources, while maintaining a balanced diet and ethical food industry. UTSpeaks forum (2009).

What is sustainable food?

Our preferred definition of sustainable food is food that is produced, processed and traded in ways that:

- (1) contribute to thriving local economies and sustainable livelihoods;
- (2) protect the diversity of both plants and animals and the welfare of farmed and wild species and avoid damaging natural resources and contributing to climate change; and
- (3) provide social benefits to the community such as good quality food, safe and healthy food products and educational and learning opportunities. Source (Sustain UK).

For further information visit:

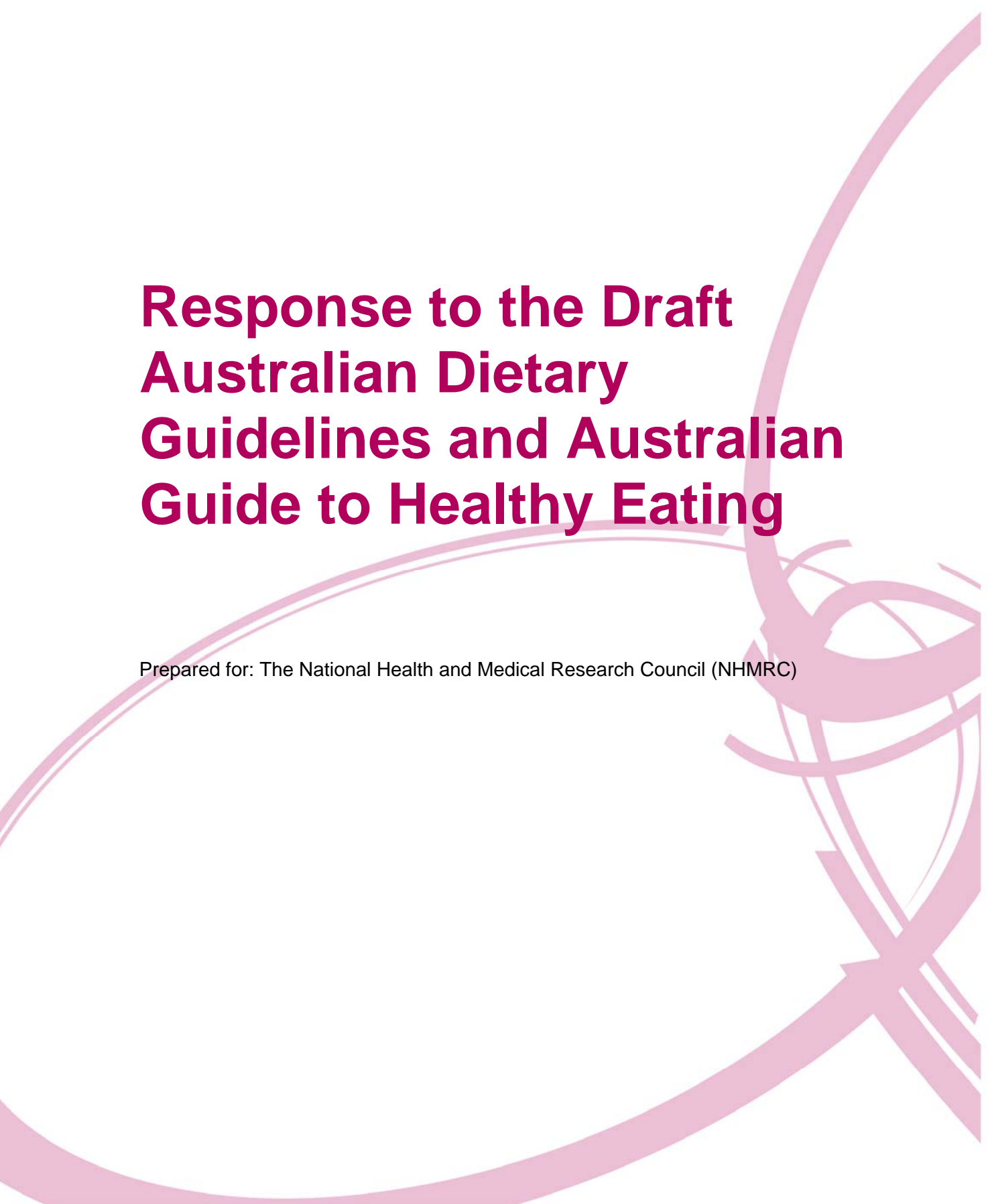
www.isf.uts.edu.au

http://www.isf.uts.edu.au/pdfs/food_cap_stat_web.pdf

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Response to the Draft Australian Dietary Guidelines and Australian Guide to Healthy Eating

Prepared for: The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC)



OUR FEEDBACK

This is a submission by the Institute for Sustainable Futures (ISF) at the University of Technology, Sydney to the public consultation on the Australian Dietary Guidelines (ADGs) which closes on Wednesday, 29 February 2012, 4:00pm. We appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback to this consultation process.

It is our understanding that the purpose of the Australian Dietary Guidelines (the Guidelines) and the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating is to provide authoritative guidance on foods, food groups and dietary patterns that protect against chronic disease while also optimising nutritional status and therefore health outcomes of all Australians.

ISF acknowledges the importance of the Guide to Healthy Eating as an essential tool for health professionals and the Australian public to provide guidance and education on food choice and appropriate serving sizes.

Areas for improvement

We are concerned that the draft guidelines and the Guide to Healthy Eating do not provide enough advice to the public on sustainable food choices and environmentally friendly food practices.

Currently the guidelines do not consider the way a food is sourced or its method of production – even though these factors influence the nutrition and environmental impact of a food.

ISF would like to see a more balanced approach in the formulation of the dietary guidelines and healthy eating guide so that they can become a useful tool to help Australians meet their health and nutritional needs while not jeopardising long term environmental sustainability. We would recommend a more extensive review of the evidence on the sustainability (and climate change) impacts of our current food and dietary practices (and vice versa). We would also like to see consideration of climate change adaptation and would like to suggest that the dietary guidelines be thought of as a tool for building resilience and capacity in the community to adapt to climate change.

Incorporating environmental sustainability into the Guidelines has the potential to be an important strategy in reducing Australia's overall greenhouse gas emissions, and therefore help to meet our international commitments to addressing climate change.

Reducing meat and dairy consumption

It is our view that more work is needed to reposition meat and dairy as *occasional* rather than everyday foods. There is good evidence that greenhouse gas emissions can be reduced through reductions in meat and dairy consumption¹. This is well documented and international environmental observers including the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), the World Bank, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and others have called attention to the environmental impacts of livestock production and meat consumption in recent years.

¹ For example: Carlsson-Kanyama, A. and Gonzalez A.D. (2009) 'Potential contributions of food consumption patterns to Climate Change', American Journal of Nutrition; Stehfest, E. Bouman, L., van Vuuren, D., Elzen, M., Eikhout, B., Kabat, P., (2008) 'Climate benefits of changing diet', Climatic Change; Carlsson-Kanyama, A. (1998) 'Climate change and dietary choices – how can emission of greenhouse gases from food consumption be reduced', Food Policy Vol. 23, No ¾.



Also, our research on sustainable phosphorus has found that producing meat products requires 10 times the phosphorus required to produce plant based products. It is our view that achieving reductions in the quantity of meat consumed in the average diet could help to improve the resilience and sustainability of our food system, and reduce our dependence on uncertain phosphate supplies.

To this end, we would like to see better guidance provided for Australians around plant based diets, including low meat, vegetarian and vegan diets. And we would like to see the environmental benefits of these diets highlighted.

The challenge for sustainability and health professionals is to make plant based diets desirable and attractive for all Australians. Dietary guidelines should therefore help to draw attention to the wide variety of foods and beverages available that can be included in sustainable (low or no meat), plant based diet, including:

- ✓ Vegetables like: leafy green vegetables (spinach, lettuce, silverbeet and bok choy), members of the crucifer or brassica family (broccoli, cabbage, and brussels sprouts), starchy root and tuber vegetables (yams and potatoes), edible plant stems (celery and asparagus), gourd vegetables (pumpkin, squash and cucumber), allium vegetables (onions, garlic and shallots), sweet corn and mushrooms (although not botanically a vegetable, mushrooms are commonly eaten alongside vegetables, and some new varieties high in vitamin D are now available).
- ✓ Fruit: pome fruit such as apples and pears, citrus fruit such as oranges and lemons, stone fruit such as apricots and plums, and berries (blue berries, cherries, raspberries, and strawberries).
- ✓ Grains: breads, cereals, rice, pasta, noodles, polenta, couscous, oats, quinoa and barley.
- ✓ Alternatives to meat and dairy such as legumes, nuts and seeds and (calcium enriched) non dairy milks such as soy, rice, oat and nut milks.
- ✓ Inclusion of herbs and spices. Herbs and spices can assist with making plant based foods more appealing and flavourful.

Also, when referring to plant based foods, we would like the guidelines to adopt positive language such as using the word 'enjoy' rather than just 'eat'.

Sustainable seafood consumption

We recommend the guidelines provide additional advice on the sustainable intake of fish and seafood and the range of alternative foods that can meet omega 3 fatty acid requirements.

Reference could be made to the Australian Sustainable Seafood Guide developed by the Australian Marine Conservation Society².

Resilience and capacity building for climate change adaptation

We believe that the Australian Dietary Guidelines could better assist with building resilience and capacity of the community to adapt to long term climate trends, include the food security challenges and food related health risks associated with climate change. Climate change will have wide ranging impacts on individual and community wellbeing and livelihoods so it is important that attention is given to building resilience and adaptive capacity within the guidelines.

² http://www.sustainableseafood.org.au/Sustainable-Seafood-Guide-Australia.asp?active_page_id=695



It is our understanding that climate change will bring increased health risks such as an increased prevalence of food-borne diseases like gastroenteritis and hepatitis. Guideline 5 (care for your food; prepare and store safely) goes some way toward addressing this issue, but perhaps clearer guidance is needed here.

Climate change related health risks may not present themselves in the short term. However, due to the infrequency of guideline reviews (we understand that the last guidelines were published in 1998), unless more frequent reviews are planned, it is important that the guidelines reflect the needs of the Australian public for the next 15 years or so. Therefore, review of the guidelines in the context of climate change adaptation would be advisable.

Food provisioning and waste

We would recommend an additional guideline that could include information and practice examples around food provisioning and waste, such as:

- Minimise food waste in your food purchase, storage, transportation, preparation and disposal practices
- Reduce, reuse and recycle food packaging

Drinking water

We would like to see 'drink tap water' rather than 'drink water', and 'avoid bottled water'. Also, additional guidance may be needed around water consumption in summer-time (and heat waves) as per our comments on climate change adaptation above. I.e. Climate change will put more Australians at risk of heat related deaths so this needs attention.

Literature reviews on environmental sustainability

ISF would like to express our concern with the consultation process, wherein the literature on the 'environmental impacts of the production and consumption of food and vice-versa' has not been publicly released. It appears that A/Professor Friel and a team at the Australian National University were commissioned to carry out a literature review, but this has not been made available. Also, the extent to which this input has influenced the determination of the guidelines has not been specified.

Finally, we think it would be appropriate for the NHMRC to review the approaches being taken internationally in relation to food guidelines and sustainable food policy. For example the Swedish National Food Administration and the Environmental Protection Agency created guidelines on environmentally friendly and healthy diets in 2009. The guidelines specifically recommend eating less meat and promote a more plant based diet³. Likewise, in 2009, the UK Sustainable Development Commission prepared advice to the UK Government which recommended reducing consumption of meat and dairy products as a priority area⁴.

³ National Food Administration and Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (2009). Environmentally Effective Food Choices: proposal notified to the EU 15 May 2009. Stockholm: Livmedel Verket.

⁴ REdd, S., Land, T., Dibb, S., Setting the table: Advice to Government on priority elements of sustainable diets, Sustainable Development Commission, December 2009, p. 4.



