



For release Friday, 28 September 2012

National Food Plan leaves experts hungry for more

Transformational change needed to ensure food security, say submissions due Sunday

The National Food Plan does not reflect evidence put forward in community submissions and consultation on the initial Discussion Paper, says a coalition of health and research agencies.

The Food Alliance highlights a lack of Australian and international research on issues such as climate change. Kathy McConell, Food Alliance Coordinator, said the alliance was 'very disappointed' with the green paper.

"It fails to reflect the numerous community voices and extensive expert evidence given in submissions, webcasts and public meetings across the nation and focuses inordinately on the interests of the food industry and short-term economic drivers," she said.

"Its business-as-usual approach is highly unrealistic because of key challenges our food system facing—from rising chronic food-related diseases to predicted environmental stresses that will render our current fuel-dependent agricultural system increasingly costly and unsustainable. There is an assumption that technological advances can overcome any limits.

"Modelling shows that parts of our food supply, such as fruit and vegetable supplies, are vulnerable, with shortages and associated price hikes increasingly likely. The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation recently called on governments to encourage a shift to sustainable diets and Australia would do well to heed this advice, given the major health and sustainability issues. Our food system is broken and requires transformational—not incremental—change."

Ms McConell added that key governance mechanisms for the National Food Plan should include an independent Food Commissioner. "We do not support the proposal for an Australian Food Council as, in the form proposed, it would not have decision-making powers," she said. "The failure to consider a range of possible scenarios and to plan for 'no regret' adaptive responses to climate change calls into question the robustness of the proposed National Food Plan."

The Food Alliance is funded by VicHealth and sits within the Food Policy Unit within the Population Health Strategic Research Centre at Deakin University.

Key points include:

- The National Food Plan aims to double food exports by 2030, yet Australia is likely to be one of the most adversely affected regions of the world due to climate change and exports of key commodities are likely to decline by between 11% (wheat) and 63% (sugar).
- Climate change is likely to affect all aspects of food production in Australia and could lead to a 92% reduction in irrigated agriculture in our main food bowl, the Murray-Darling Basin.
- More than 3 in 4 Australian men and women will be overweight or obese by 2025.
- More than 70% of Australian farms don't earn enough to support the family on them.
- Some ¼ of Australia's carbon emissions are attributable to the food system.
- The proportion of Australia's population that cannot afford to buy food at some stage each year of 5% (average) – 25% (vulnerable groups) is likely to be under-reported.

Contact Vivienne Reiner Ph (02) 9440 8021, 0432 352 132
vivienne@sourcecommunications.com.au