



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA

Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
Foreign Affairs and Aid Sub-Committee

MEDIA RELEASE

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Chair: The Hon Dr Sharman Stone MP
Deputy: Senator Alex Gallacher

Food for thought: improving health and nutrition in the Indo—Pacific region

Improving health and nutrition in Australia's neighbourhood is the subject of the first report of the inquiry into *the role of development partnerships in agriculture and agribusiness in promoting prosperity, reducing poverty and enhancing stability in the Indo-Pacific region* released today by the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (JSCFADT).

The Chair of the JSCFADT's Foreign Affairs and Aid Sub-Committee, the Hon Dr Sharman Stone MP, said that a major focus for the inquiry has been the so-called 'double burden' of malnutrition.

"This is when there is a coexistence of both under and overnutrition – which has a high cost to Indo-Pacific countries. Undernutrition is one of the largest causes of child mortality in children under five years. Stunting in children, which can be a sign of inadequate nutrition can cause irreversible developmental problems. Overnutrition and obesity on the other hand can cause non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and coronary disease," Dr Stone said.

Undernutrition is a severe problem for some of Australia's nearest neighbours with child stunting rates high, for example in Timor-Leste and Papua New Guinea. At the same time globally, of the top ten countries with the highest rates of overweight and obese adults, nine are Pacific island nations.

"The double burden of malnutrition in the Indo-Pacific region, especially in Pacific Island countries threatens the health of individuals, and the growth of regional economies," Dr Stone said. "The scale of these problems and the tragic outcomes cannot be underestimated. The high rates of diabetic related amputations in some of these Pacific countries is not only a tragedy for individuals it's also placing pressure on already stretched health services," Dr Stone said.

The importance of local agriculture, the promotion of local cuisines and the role women can play in achieving better dietary outcomes for their families are some of the issues explored in the report as possible means to combat this health crisis and improve the nutritional health of our neighbours.

The report makes a range of recommendations to address the double burden of malnutrition, looming as a malnutrition crisis. In particular it needs promoting though a more co-ordinated and targeted approach by all stakeholders in the region.

The full report, information about the inquiry, including copies of submissions and public hearing transcripts, can be found on the committee's website at www.aph.gov.au/jfadt.

For media inquiries:

Please contact the Foreign Affairs and Aid Sub-Committee Chair, the Hon Dr Sharman Stone MP on (03) 5821 5371 (Electorate Office) or (02) 6277 4477 (Parliament House) or the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Secretariat on (02) 6277 2313.