

Submission No. 152

(Inq into Obesity)

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Slow Food® Perth

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND AGEING

Perth, 06 Nov 2008

Witness: Jamie Kronborg
Co-leader, Slow Food Perth convivium

ORGANISATION SUMMARY

Slow Food Perth is a *convivium* [branch] of Slow Food, an international not-for-profit organisation founded in 1989 to counteract fast food and fast life, the disappearance of local food traditions, people's dwindling interest in the food they eat, where it comes from, how it tastes and how our food choices affect the rest of the world – people, communities, animals, plants and the environment. Slow Food is based in Bra, Italy. It has almost 100,000 members in 132 countries. Western Australia has four of Australia's 36 Slow Food convivia. Slow Food Perth has 200 members including chefs, cooks, families, producers, retailers, students, food merchants, winemakers and scientists. All of our activities are co-ordinated by volunteers.

Slow Food's key philosophy embraces the tenets of *good*, *clean* and *fair* – that the food we eat should taste good and be good for us; that its production should be sustainable, grown and created in ways that respect and enhance the environment – animals, plants and people's health; and that producers should receive equitable reward for their work.

In essence the organisation fosters and builds awareness of *local* foods and the people and communities which produce them. It encourages consumers to make an informed choice about the foods they buy and eat. The success of this strategy enhances food diversity, competition and demand, sustains artisan producers and their families, and helps to build business, often in small rural communities.

Slow Food national organisations have been developed in:

- Australia
- France
- Germany
- Italy
- Japan
- Switzerland
- The Netherlands
- United Kingdom
- United States of America

The establishment of Slow Food Australia was approved by Slow Food's international council, meeting in Switzerland, in June 2008. It is the first Slow Food national organisation to be developed in the southern hemisphere.

Slow Food has established a range of programmes and participating organisations to support its mission:

The Foundation for Biodiversity, headquartered in Florence, Italy

- An organisation with subsidiary national committees called Ark Commissions which identify foods at risk of loss, and work with local food communities to develop and maintain production and markets. (In 20 years Slow Food's praesidia project has helped to save about 500 foods at risk of loss to farming communities and consumers.)

Terra Madre: world meeting of food communities

- An international biennial meeting of farmers, cooks, chefs, students and academics to explore common challenges in food production, marketing, environment management, and to use the knowledge exchanged in local communities

Salone del Gusto

- The 'world's fair' of artisan foods, held concurrently with Terra Madre, to promote 'small' food that is good, clean and fair

University of Gastronomic Sciences, in Pollenza, Italy

- A tertiary institution which offers graduate, post-graduate, masters and doctoral degrees across the range of food-related disciplines, including agriculture and botany, nutrition, and food economics

Slow Food Australia is developing a series of related programmes and projects to build food awareness and complement the mission of Slow Food internationally. These programmes and projects are based on the activities of local *convivia* [branches], the core of Slow Food's international network. Relative to the standing committee's inquiry, some of these activities can be as straightforward as raising funds for further development of the Wembley Downs primary school garden in suburban Perth, in which Slow Food Perth has been directly involved for several years. Within the Slow Food Australia project framework, the work of Slow Food Perth with this school, and others, will become part of three national projects:

Dirty hands, a school and community garden development programme supporting local communities and collaborative organisations to enhance school communities' food, health and ecological knowledge and awareness; and

Heliculture, a project within universities and vocational colleges to encourage undergraduates in health, nutrition and horticulture disciplines to offer peer skills to primary schools and primary students to develop food awareness through the Dirty hands programme.

Bush know-how, a project in collaboration with aboriginal communities to sustain and enhance traditional food knowledge and to extend this knowledge within primary school communities across the country, so that a shared awareness of food and cultural diversity, and the value of food to children's health, can be built.

To support its application to Slow Food's international council in which it sought approval for the establishment of Slow Food Australia earlier this year, the Australian working group and *convivia* made the following submission, which we believe is relevant to this inquiry:

Project / Dirty hands

Picture this...

CENTRAL western Queensland. Year 4 kids at Roma state school are pretty excited. They are about to have a communal lunch in the playground. They've grown all the salad ingredients despite a long drought. The P&C chipped in the money for the school garden irrigation system and a fence and the lettuce seedlings and herbs the kids planted a few months before have come on strongly. They've learned that mulching helps. They've made the salads. Now there's a buzz in the air. The teacher brings forward an old Aboriginal man – a local elder. He has a bag in his hand. In it are some desert limes and some dull green leaves to go with the salad. The Roma kids are about to learn some stuff about bush tucker.

Project outline

- Access Economics estimates that the total cost of obesity to Australia has already reached \$21 billion – or \$1000 per person – per year¹. One in 10 people on earth are hungry, and yet the one billion people who are overweight outnumber them². Slow Food in Australia and its convivia can work in a practical way with schools and communities to extend taste education and food awareness that makes for healthier kids.

Hungry?

- Food academic and activist Raj Patel says that the latest figures suggest that one in three Australian men are overweight or obese, together 50% of Australian women and a quarter of the country's children – 25% of boys and 23.3% of girls from kindergarten to Year 10 age³ compared with an overall 5% in the 1960s. 'More than 400,000 Australians have diabetes and don't even know it. And this happens at the same time as hunger persists in Australia, particularly in aboriginal communities. Indeed, in some studies, almost one in four households were reported as going hungry one or more times a week. These are two sides of the same coin. Overweight and hungry people are linked through the chains of production that bring food from fields to our plate.'⁴

Kitchen gardens

- Late in 2007 the commonwealth government committed \$12.8 million to The Kitchen Garden Foundation – which has established model food gardens in schools across Victoria – to extend the foundation's programme to 190 schools in Australia, or 19,000 children, by 2011. The programme currently runs in 27 Victorian schools under the direct guidance of a

¹ Hon. Nicola Roxon MP, Minister for Health and Ageing: Tackling Childhood Obesity in Australia Summit [Sydney 11 Dec 2007]

² stuffedandstarved.org/drupal/node/206

³ Australian Society for the Study of Obesity

⁴ Raj Patel: address to the Brisbane Writers' Festival [2007]

charitable foundation established by chef Stephanie Alexander. It enjoys the support of numerous individuals and businesses, seven state agencies and local councils, industry associations and philanthropic trusts. Concerns⁵ have been expressed that the foundation's model does not necessarily meet all schools' or communities' requirements – particularly in those schools where gardens developed independently of the foundation are used as 'outdoor classrooms' rather than as part of a structured 'garden-to-table' method inherent in the foundation's programme. There is the vanguard model developed by Black Forest primary school in South Australia in 1997 and fresh approaches to the same idea by local councils, such as inner Sydney Randwick's *Sustainable Schools Initiative*.

- Beyond schools are community gardens, such as city farm and similar projects in most states. In south-eastern New South Wales the Bega Valley Community Gardens Project⁶, with six gardens, trials crops and produces seedlings and 'share seeds' for use in community and private gardens, measures production volumes and provides markets for surplus production. The approach of this 'bio-region' has laid the foundation for the development of community agriculture, where participants in the community gardens are encouraged to consider broader-acre production. The Australian City Farmers & Community Gardens Network⁷, formed in 1996, provides a 'slow and loose' confederation for the exchange of information on garden development and urban agriculture. Its raft of practical advice, from 'getting started' to finding suitable land and managing gardens, is based on building community ownership of garden projects from the bottom up. Cultivating Community is a Melbourne-based not-for-profit organisation that works to encourage community-based sustainable urban agriculture in public housing and other communities. It co-ordinates 17 metropolitan community gardens and five school gardens.
- At the heart of gardening is the back yard. Australian Ark Commission acting chairman Bob MacLennan says: 'One sure way to reduce food miles is to have food gardens in back yards – and even front yards to agitate the neighbours!' Melbourne Greek Cypriot émigré Mark Dymiotis has not only a highly productive back yard – he uses his wood-fired oven to document traditional recipes that older Greek women know how to prepare but have not written down. Members of other migrant groups, especially first-generation Italians and Vietnamese, grow much of their food for more than economic reasons.

Collaborative opportunities

- Slow Food convivia in Australia are actively involved in school and community gardens in many regions. In Western Australia a working group – School Kitchen Gardens – involving the food charity Foodbank, Slow Food Perth and Fremantle convivia, and state health and education agencies, is devising a template for school and community gardens for adaptation by any school. The group's target is the introduction of a school kitchen garden programme into the primary education curriculum. The nursery trade association Nursery & Garden Industry Australia has also developed *KidsGrow*, a fully-kitted gardens development programme for schools supported by more than 100 nurseries across the country. *KidsGrow* is designed to encourage young children to gain hands-on understanding of garden ecology and provide outdoor experiences centred on academic, personal and social development. It is linked with the Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative – AuSSI – a partnership between all Australian governments which supports more than 2000 schools to take a sustainable approach to the

⁵ onlineopinion.com.au

⁶ thebegavalley.org.au/gardens.html

⁷ communitygarden.org.au

education environment at every level, from planning and maintaining a school's grounds and encouraging natural biodiversity to energy and waste management.

Knock-on programmes

- The proposed Slow Food *Heliculture* project in Australian universities would provide opportunities for horticulture and nutrition undergraduates and those in related fields to become involved the *Dirty hands* project as mentors, encouraging children to interact with and learn from young adults not directly involved in a school's day-to-day affairs. Through *Bush know-how*, Slow Food would provide an important opportunity for children to learn about bush tucker in a school garden environment and improve awareness of indigenous culture.

Project / Dirty hands / task summary

Generic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improving children's food and ecological awareness and health
Programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Dirty hands</i>
Crossover projects / programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Heliculture ▪ Bush know-how ▪ <i>Slow food at the edge of the world</i>

Scope of tasks

Slow Food Australia

- Identify active convivia supporting school and community garden projects
- Establish a Dirty hands rout of interested and skilled representatives from convivia, school communities and other organisations to guide the project

Rout

- Collaborate with schools and organisations to design and devise the practical roll-out of templates for school and community garden development
- Identify potential funding sources for the project
- With convivia involved in school gardens, identify rural community primary schools with Aboriginal student populations with which these convivia can be paired to mentor the development of another garden
- Devise ways to introduce information about Australian Ark Commission aims and activities into the project
- Work with the Bush know-how rout to ensure bush tucker knowledge awareness becomes a feature of the project
- Work with convivia which have identified – as part of the Slow knowledge project information collection process for *Slow food at the edge of the world* – people with food gardens in their back and front yards to encourage these gardeners to participate in *Dirty hands*

Convivia

- Nominate representatives to the Dirty hands rout
- Identify schools to which *Dirty hands* could be introduced and gardens established
- Encourage Heliculture members' voluntary work with participating schools
- Develop school gardens, involving indigenous people and those food-gardeners identified through *Slow food at the edge of the world*