

## Submission No. 99

(Inq into Obesity)

*KE 20166108*

House Standing Committee  
on Health and Ageing  
Inquiry into Obesity in Australia  
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Dear Committee,

### Regarding obesity in Australia

I was alerted to the existence of this enquiry by the appearance of the Adelaide Advertiser article reproduced at the end of this letter.

While I am a committee member of Animal Liberation in South Australia, this submission hasn't been authorised by the committee and should be considered as a personal submission.

#### CSIRO diet worse than the disease

The statements regarding the "success" of the CSIRO diet struck me as bizarre given the recent publication by the *Total Wellbeing Diet* authors of the follow-up study on the results of their research[1]. This followup study was done 12 months after the initial 12 week study which is advertised on the CSIRO web site as the *research behind the diet*<sup>1</sup>.

The initial 12 week study compared people on a normal low fat diet with people on the CSIRO high protein diet[2]. Quoting from the original study:

*"Weight loss was 7.3±0.3 kg with both diets."*

So the *Total Wellbeing Diet* was entirely unimpressive and ordinary.

The followup study — after 12 months — also found that people on the CSIRO diet lost, on average, the *same* amount of weight as those on the "normal" low fat control diet. Quoting from the journal:

*"Results: Mean (±SD) weight loss was not significantly different between groups: (HP: 4.6±5.5 kg; HC: 4.4±6.1 kg). ... Cardiovascular disease risk factors, biomarkers of disease, and serum vitamins and minerals improved with no differences between groups."*

The followup study purported to find some evidence that weight was lost in different places in people on the high protein diet. The effect was small and possibly due to the method of statistical analysis. Since they could find no difference between the high protein and the control diet group they changed the method of analysis — always a sign of desperation.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.csiro.au/csiro/content/standard/psk3,,.html>

## Triglycerides

I note also that the initial 12 week study claimed that the weight loss was highest in women with high triglyceride levels. This would be important if true — because these women are at greater risk of diabetes and other diseases. The CSIRO has been making this claim about its wonderful results in this subgroup on its website since at least 2005. The followup study found that this claimed effect was no longer present. I would suggest it was always just a statistical “blip” and never a real effect. Finding illusory results in subgroups is a well known statistical trap — not something that experienced researchers should have fallen for.

## Who knew what and when?

As just stated, the follow up study found there was no “triglyceride effect” — an effect used on the CSIRO website to sell the diet. When was the research we are actually talking about done? According to CSIRO<sup>2</sup> it was done in 2002. So by the end of 2003, the CSIRO knew there was no “triglyceride” effect, but still used it to sell their diet anyway.

## Lies about colorectal cancer risk

Even if the CSIRO diet was effective, it is dangerous because it puts people at increased risk of colorectal cancer. The CSIRO Board was told this in April 2006. Documents obtained under FOI legislation show that the board was informed that:

*“Recent findings from [CSIRO] scientists have established that diets high in red meat, processed meats and the dairy protein casein can significantly increase the risk of bowel cancer.”*

A few months later the CSIRO release **Book 2** of the diet in which it told the public something quite different:

*“Studies have shown that fresh red meat (beef and lamb) is not a significant risk factor for colorectal cancer.”*

The April edition of *The Monthly*[3] published my full account of this betrayal of the trust of the Australian public, but the CSIRO is, it seems, allowed to lie to the Australian public and to promote diets which cause cancer.

## Protein is excessive

The CSIRO diet recommends people get about 30% of their calories from protein. This is above the recommended limit of 25% from the NHMRC[4]. There is simply no long term scientific data establishing the safety of this level of protein. This again is a basic failure of the CSIRO Board to do “due diligence” on this diet.

## Suggestions for Fighting Obesity

I now turn from a critique of the CSIRO diet to some more general considerations regarding obesity.

<sup>2</sup> Email to me from CSIRO's Claire Manson.

Obesity in our society is a function of many things — not just food.

**Poor Planning** When the SA State Government announced school closures to establish a few “super schools” they didn’t consider the impact this would have on obesity and petrol use. Fewer children will be walking to school and they will travel longer distances — either by car or bus.

**Poor Planning again** ... Replace many supermarkets by a few big ones and you get fewer people walking and more people travelling longer distances.

**Supermarkets deliberately promoting junk to children.** Visit any supermarket and you will see both powerful and subtle incentives to buy junk. Product placement, advertising, lighting. All are designed to sell food that is high in calories and low in nutrients. If we, as a society, were serious about reducing obesity (or binge drinking for that matter), we would make access to dangerous products more difficult rather than blindingly easy.

**Fast food makers rewarded for ruining good food.** Consider potatoes. An excellent food. If that was all you ate, your protein intake would exceed NHMRC recommendations, as would your intake of most other nutrients. They have served as a staple in many countries. By the time McDonalds, and other fast food makers, have finished loading them with fat, their protein to calorie ratio has dropped so low that they are no longer a good food and will leave you deficient in protein and many other nutrients if you ate enough of them. I.e., hash browns and fries are a serious health hazard but they are cheap and tasty. We should tax this rubbish in exactly the same way as we tax cigarettes and alcohol.

**What exactly is junk food?** The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has a diet quality index. It has a category which is supposed to indicate the amount of saturated fat in your diet. The index is called *Saturated Fat(Junk Food)*.

Where is the saturated fat in a Big Mac? In the lettuce, or the bun? It is in the meat. The 9.7g of saturated fat in a Big Mac is over 3 times more than the 2.9g in a *large* fries. A Big Mac is high in saturated fat because of the meat. A large coke is junk food because of a high calories to nutrient ratio, but the Big Mac is junk food because of the meat. But visit any supermarket and there are trays and trays of mince and sausages with *far higher* saturated fat levels than a Big Mac. I.e., Much of the meat on sale in Australian supermarkets is just junk food. Taking it home to cook it won’t fix this problem. When butchers trim meat to make those lean red beef cuts that rich educated people buy, where does the trim end up? Ask in your supermarket. I asked in mine how much fat was in the huge tubs of cheap mince on sale at low prices. I got a wry smile and a single word — “lots!”. The perfectly reasonable insistence by health authorities on reducing saturated fat intake has split the red meat market into high end meat which just causes colorectal cancer and the low end market which causes both colorectal cancer and all manner of circulatory problems from erectile dysfunction through to heart disease.

Which brings us back to where we started. For every person sticking to the CSIRO diet and eating lean red meat, there will be somebody else eating their fat — the trim cut off their meat. So, not only will this diet increase colorectal cancer rates in people following it, but it will increase obesity and circulatory diseases in people not following it.

While we have the nation’s top research organisation selling its soul to be the propaganda

arm of Meat and Livestock Australia, while we have a government scared to tackle the big meat and junk food companies, we will keep our position as colorectal cancer capital of the world, we will continue to have 40,000 major heart procedures annually, we will make Pfizer a small fortune in viagra sales as middle aged men try to undo the damage of their diet, and our kids will continue to get fatter and sicker quicker.

Yours faithfully,

Geoff Russell. B.Sc (Maths), B.A (Hons)

## References

- [1] Peter M Clifton, Jennifer B Keogh, and Manny Noakes. Long-term effects of a high-protein weight-loss diet. *Am J Clin Nutr*, 87(1):23–29, 2008.
- [2] Manny Noakes, Jennifer B Keogh, Paul R Foster, and Peter M Clifton. Effect of an energy-restricted, high-protein, low-fat diet relative to a conventional high-carbohydrate, low-fat diet on weight loss, body composition, nutritional status, and markers of cardiovascular health in obese women. *Am J Clin Nutr*, 81(6):1298–1306, 2005.
- [3] Geoff Russell. Confounders. *The Monthly*, April 2008.
- [4] National Health and Medical Research Council. *Nutrient Reference Values for Australia and New Zealand including Recommended Dietary Intakes*. 2005.