

Senate Enquiry into junk food advertising

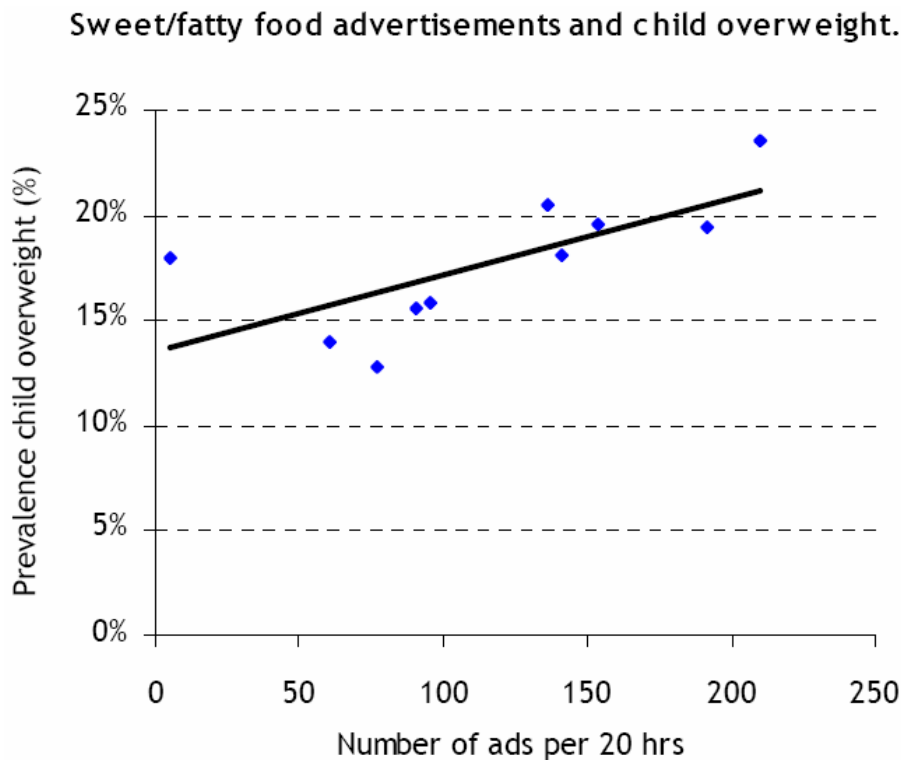
Supplementary information from Dr Rosemary Stanton

Sent by email November 23 2008

These comments relate to the one-page document provided to the Senate Enquiry on November 19 from the Australasian Beverages Council. The page was labelled ANNEX and related to correlations between childhood obesity and food advertisements. I do not believe the information in table B is correct.

The data listing the number of food ads per hour comes from a 1996 paper (**reference:** *Dibb S. A spoonful of sugar: television food advertising aimed at children: an international comparative survey. UK: Consumers International 1996*). The Australasian Beverages Council has quoted these figures correctly, although they may no longer be relevant 12 years after publication of the original data.

Sue Dibb, one of the authors of the above paper, co-authored another paper published in 2005 showing a positive correlation between the percentage of overweight children and advertisements for sweet/fatty foods. The results were graphed as shown below.



reference: *Lobstein T, Dibb S. Evidence of a possible link between obesogenic food advertising and child overweight. Obesity Reviews. 2005; 6:203-8.*

The data given by the Australasian Beverages Council for the percentage of children who are classified as overweight or obese refers to figures published by the International Obesity Taskforce for children from European countries aged "around 10 years of age". The information was collected at various times, in 1992 for some countries and up to 2001 for others. The data does not apply across the range of children's ages and does not apply to data that spans age ranges for children, either at that time or using more recent data.

The United States figures do not appear to come from the IOTF. The USA uses different criteria when assessing the incidence of obesity in children and so the figures from the US are not validly compared with the other values for the 10-year-olds in this table. Using the IOTF criteria, a 1998 survey for 6-18 year-olds in the US reported that 26% were overweight or obese. (**reference:** *Wang Y, Monterio C, Popkin BM. Trends of obesity and underweight in older children and adolescents in the United States, Brazil, China, and Russia. Am J Clin Nutr. 2002 Jun;75(6):971-7.*) More recently (2003/4), the IOTF notes that data using their criteria and applied to 6-17 year-olds in the US shows that 35% are overweight or obese (www.iotf.org).

I am unsure where the Australian figures used in the document came from. Our 1995 National Nutrition Survey data for 9-11 year-olds (the closest ages to the 10-year-old figures from Europe) reported that 23% of this age group were overweight or obese. Our most recent survey national study reports that 23% of 2-16 year-olds are overweight or obese (**reference:** *Australian Government. Australian Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey 2007.* Studies from various states within Australia that have measured weight status among school-aged children generally show higher figures ranging from 25-30%. (references available if required).

For French children, the ANNEX figure of 18% overweight or obese for 10-year-olds does not fit with more recent data for a wider range of ages, which shows that 15% of children aged 3-14 are overweight or obese (**reference:** *LioRET S, Marie B, Volatier JL, Charles MA. Child overweight in France and its relationship with physical activity, sedentary behaviour and socioeconomic status. Eur J Clin Nutr. 2007 Apr;61(4):509-16.*)

For UK children, the ANNEX used a figure of 22% overweight or obese. Using data for 5-17 year-old children in the UK, 29% were rated overweight or obese in 2004 (www.itof.org).

In Greece, using a wider age range, 21% of 6-17 year-olds are overweight or obese (**reference:** *Georgiadis G, Nassis GP. Prevalence of overweight and*

obesity in a national representative sample of Greek children and adolescents. Eur J Clin Nutr. 2007 Sep;61(9):1072-4.)

I have not checked all the other figures, but this should suffice to note that the data supplied is problematic for not using the same criteria for all countries, not reflecting all ages and not having wide variation in the date the data was collected. Overweight and obesity in children has been increasing in most countries throughout the world.

There is also a major problem quoting the number of advertisements seen in countries such as Sweden and Belgium which officially do not permit advertising in programs directed to children. Children have widespread access to programs from neighbouring countries that do contain advertisements.

It may be worth noting that Australia is in a unique position to trial restrictions on advertising of junk foods on television since we are not exposed to advertisements beamed in from other countries.

New study

The Senate may also be interested to learn of a new study released since the enquiry day. The study from researchers in three Universities in the USA concludes that "A ban on advertisements (for fast foods) would reduce the number of overweight children, ages 3–11, in a fixed population by 18 percent and would reduce the number of overweight adolescents, ages 12–18, by 14 percent." The authors also looked at removing tax deductibility for these advertisements. (**reference:** Chou S-Y, Rashad I, Grossman M. Fast-Food Restaurant Advertising on Television and Its Influence on Childhood Obesity. The Journal of Law and Economics, 2008. 51(4); 599-618.

Please contact me if you require further details about the matters raised in this supplementary submission.

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