

Australian Medical Association Limited

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President: Dr Mukesh Haikerwal
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The Secretary
Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Secretary

Thank you for the opportunity for the Australian Medical Association (AMA) to contribute to the Senate Inquiry into Australia's future oil supply and alternative transport fuels. The AMA is Australia's peak medico political body, which represents its members and advocates for better health and healthcare for the general public. This submission will comment on aspects b, c and d of the inquiry's terms of reference from the perspective of human health.

B) potential of new sources of oil and alternative transport fuels to meet a significant share of Australia's fuel demands, taking into account technological developments and environmental and economic costs.

Recently the AMA has considered fuel issues in the context of the impact of air pollution on human health. In terms of alternative transport fuels the AMA supports replacement of petrol/diesel vehicles with those that use liquid petroleum gas (LPG) or compressed natural gas (CNG). The AMA also supports increased research into alternative fuels as a means of reducing the impact of air pollution on human health.

Whilst the AMA supports the use of ethanol and biodiesel from a human health perspective we recognise the potentially prohibitive environmental costs and conflict between land use for food and that for fuel particularly in so-called developing countries. Hence although we support the use of both ethanol and biodiesel great care is needed to ensure it is produced in an environmentally sustainable fashion and does not compete with food production capacity in developing countries.

c) flow-on economic and social impacts in Australia from continuing rises in the price of transport fuel and potential reductions in oil supply

The AMA, through its Public Health Committee has a strong focus on addressing areas of health inequality. A person's social and economic circumstances affect their health throughout their life. A social gradient of health runs across society and while the most profound differences in health can be seen between the most and least disadvantaged a gradient exists across the whole population.

Continued rises in fuel costs for individuals and families will eat into disposable income resulting in a steepening of the social gradient particularly if fuel increases have an inflationary effect on other consumption goods.

d) options for reducing Australia's transport fuel demands.

Physical activity produces a range of health benefits for all ages as does minimising exposure to air pollution. Therefore the AMA support endeavours to increase the use of non-motorised vehicular transport (such as walking, cycling) where feasible (and where exposure to air borne pollutants is not increased) for the health benefits that these activities provide.

Thank you again for the opportunity to contribute to this Inquiry.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'ME. Chirgwin', written in a cursive style.

Dr Margaret Chirgwin
Director
Public Health and Ethics Department

24 February 2006