



ANU CENTRE FOR DIALOGUE

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Towards a National Food and Nutrition Policy

*Learnings from a dialogue to inform the advocacy approach
of the Dietitians Association of Australia and the
Public Health Association of Australia
Canberra, 18 June 2009*



30 July 2009



DAA and PHAA would like to thank the DAA Corporate Partners, Meat and Livestock Australia and Dairy Australia, and Forum sponsors, Sanitarium and the Australian Food and Grocery Council for their sponsorship support of this important event.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the dialogue

The dialogue was commissioned by the Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA) and the Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) as a means of consulting with their constituents. It was facilitated by the ANU Centre for Dialogue in Canberra on 18 June 2009. The purpose of the gathering was to bring together a group of food and nutrition stakeholders to develop:

- Guiding principles for the implementation of a new whole of government National Food and Nutrition policy in Australia
- An action plan to drive policy development and implementation forward.

A list of participants is provided at Attachment 1.

1.2 The report

This report does not attempt to be a record of the dialogue content; it is designed to articulate views expressed through the dialogue and to give direction for next steps towards the outcomes participants want to achieve in the national interest. It provides a start for further work by identifying:

- Areas of agreement
- A broad framework for the policy
- Issues requiring more attention
- A way forward.

Feedback and evaluation

Feedback is an important part of ongoing dialogue. A draft report was developed and sent to all participants in early July 2009 along with a feedback and evaluation form. (See Attachment 2.) The final report is derived from notes taken at the dialogue itself or the pre-dialogue consultations, and input from the evaluation. It also includes comments from the facilitator.

The evaluation included questions which were rated on a five point scale and qualitative feedback. A summary of the rated questions is provided here to give a quick picture of participant response. Qualitative comment on the two lowest scoring issues has received particular emphasis in the new material included in this final report.

Summary of the evaluation

Evaluation question	Average score
To what extent does the report reflect the content of the dialogue?	4.5
How useful is the report as a guide for future advocacy action?	3.9
How well does the draft vision express the aspirations of the sector?	3.8
To what extent was dialogue the appropriate method to achieve the day's outcomes?	4.1
Did you have adequate opportunity to express your views?	4.5

Please rate the importance to you of the 'in-the-round' configuration.	4.2
Please rate the facilitation provided overall.	4.2
Please rate pre-dialogue administration overall.	4.3

1.3 Messages from the dialogue

Essentially, the dialogue message streamed in two directions:

- Keep this dialogue going and involve more stakeholders in developing a broad integrated approach to food policy
- and
- Keep it simple - Develop focussed, unambiguous and compelling messages which engage government and the community.

At first glance the two directions may seem at odds, but both are essential – the former to ensure that right messages and broad ownership and the latter to ensure that real action results from the talk. The challenge for DAA and PHAA is to get the balance right between the two.

An additional message from the feedback was that, while a reasonable start has been made, there is more work to do if a truly integrated approach is to be achieved, particularly around:

- issues associated with the identifying the multi-sectoral scope of those involved in the food and nutrition area¹
- building a commitment to advocacy action across the sectors
- developing advocacy strategies which demonstrate a sense of urgency and momentum.

1.4 Follow up from the dialogue

It was suggested that a small but broadly based working party should be set up to work with issues raised in this dialogue and to develop and implement an advocacy approach supporting the development and implementation of an integrated National Food and Nutrition Policy for Australia.

¹ Feedback indicated that the scope covered by 'food sector' is currently unclear to several participants and that it might be more accurate to talk of the 'food-related sectors'. See 3.1 for more discussion on this.

2. Areas of agreement

There appeared to be a consensus around these issues:

1. A safe, nutritious, good quality, sustainable food supply is fundamental to Australia's health, wellbeing and prosperity.
2. An integrated approach to the national food and nutrition policy is required.
 - Its outcomes should cover at least health, nutritional requirements, food industry needs and contributions, social justice and sustainability issues,
 - Agriculture, trade, food security and government administration were also considered to be important aspects of a food and nutrition policy
 - It should be clear about implementation expectations of each area.
3. The broader the scope of a policy, the more difficult it is to implement. Leadership from the top and clear governance arrangements which support cross sector collaboration are essential to an integrated approach and for successful outcomes.
4. Advocacy messages must be clear and compelling and are more likely to succeed if they are simple, evidence based and take account of current government agendas.
5. Food is a long term issue and bi-partisan political support must be achieved.
6. Policy is not enough on its own to achieve change. This will require a tripartite approach involving:
 - Political commitment
 - Multi-sectoral support including not only food industry, public health and nutrition entities but related areas such as agriculture, trade, environmental science and food security
 - Community engagement.
7. Future strategies should take account of the lessons learned since the 1992 Food and Nutrition Policy such as:
 - The advantages and disadvantages of locating implementation responsibility in one department
 - The importance of maintaining momentum and promoting the policy across the food and nutrition sectors
 - The critical importance of maintaining an adequate data collection in order to measure progress
 - The importance of bi-partisan support
 - The need to set up, resource and support integration structures eg the Strategic Inter-Governmental Nutrition Alliance of the National Public Health Partnership (SIGNAL)
 - The need for adequate resourcing to support implementation.

3. A food and nutrition policy framework

In approaching this task it is worth noting participants' comments -

We are not the group to write the policy, but we can work out what is needed and what we hope to achieve.

Policy is about intent. The actions come later.²

However, a broad framework for a national food and nutrition policy was developed in draft at the dialogue. Such a framework helps communicate the sector's thinking both internally and externally. It covers a vision, outcomes, enabling factors and some suggested strategies, and has been adjusted to take account of the evaluation. It is a start and can be refined and expanded through further feedback to ensure a clear and agreed direction.

In addition to the draft framework on the following page, this section covers

- Establishing the scope of an integrated approach
- Developing an inspiring vision
- Need for high level government leadership and appropriate governance arrangements
- Need for a tripartite strategy - political commitment, multi-sectoral support and community engagement.

3.1 Establishing the scope of an integrated approach

The dialogue supported an integrated approach to policy -

The policy should identify a vision for all sectors related to food and nutrition in Australia – a joint vision so that we know what we are moving towards.

However participants felt there is a need to confirm what this implies. Should it be a food policy or a food and nutrition policy or a food and health policy or a food and agriculture policy? There is an argument that the more generic and simple term 'food' is more inclusive, and more easily accommodates a multi-sectoral approach.

The draft policy framework specifies outcomes related to health, the food supply, the citizenry, the environment and the food industry; and enablers related to sound governance, leadership and bipartisan support, stakeholder commitment, targeted research, evidence and resourcing.

However, other stakeholders may add further perspectives on this. For example population policy was mentioned as an important link. Also marketing and regulation received little attention although they seem a key part of the ongoing food conversation and presumably would be mentioned in an integrated policy framework.³ If the links are expanded to include food security very broad national and international perspectives are raised which are also not covered in this draft.

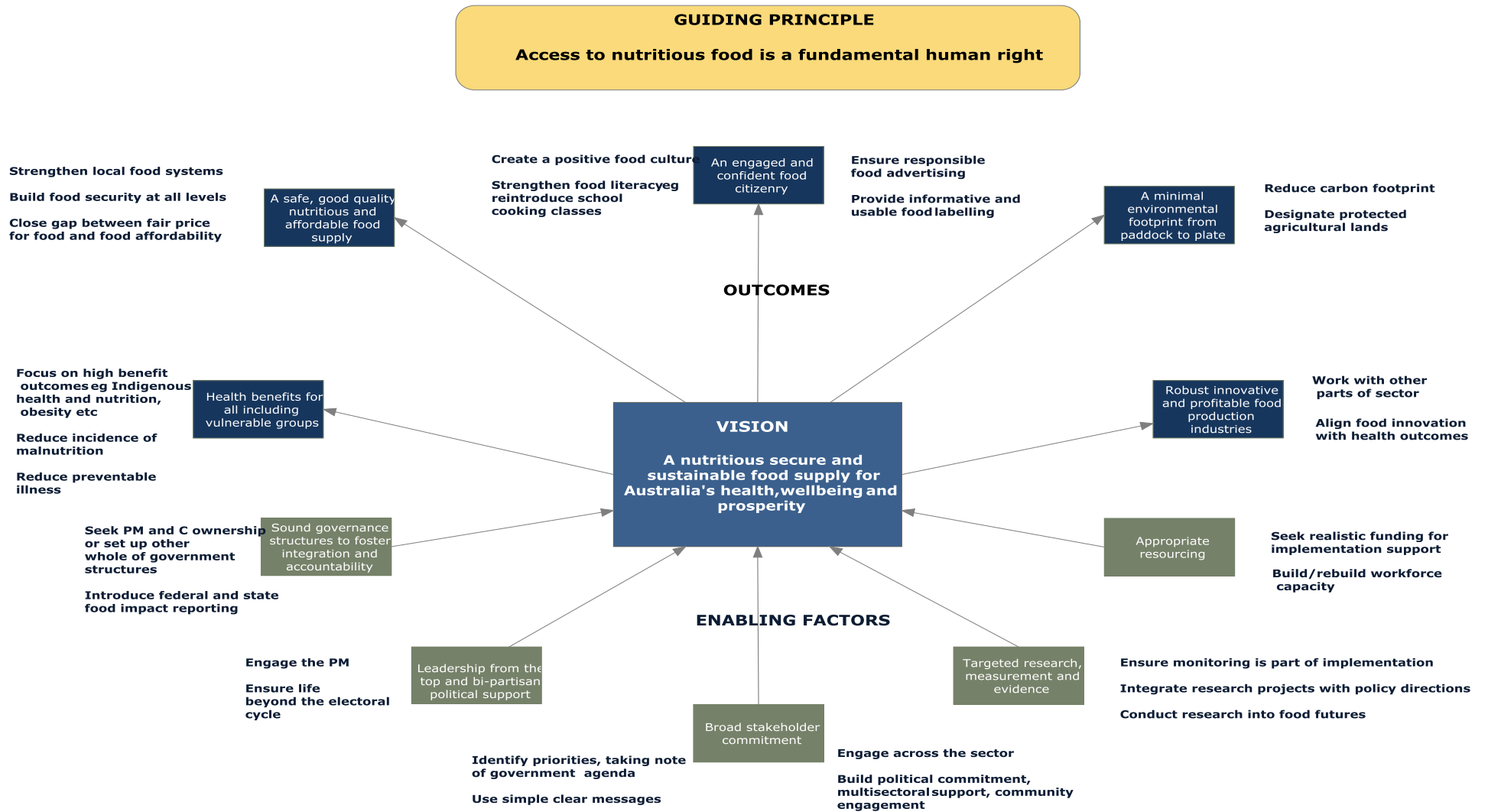
A comment illustrates the dilemma –

We have to draw some boundaries to make things manageable. Otherwise we are making policy for the world. We need to acknowledge the links but essentially this policy is for Australia.

² Italicised sentences in this report are taken from notes taken at the dialogue or written feedback.

³ Food waste was another area which received little attention.

A draft framework for an integrated National Food and Nutrition Policy



In Australia a further factor to consider is the relationship between this policy and that of the State and Territory governments in developing their own food and nutrition policies.

This comment from the feedback is also worth noting:

I think [the framework] has been drawn towards a primary health focus – I think this will result in a policy framework which is acceptable to the health sector but without enough relevance for the other sectors involved in the food system. While focus is important, this was identified as a major deficiency of the 1992 policy. Broadening the base of consultation might swing the pendulum back.

Comment

In the end, the scope may be a decision for the policy makers not for the related sectors. However, this issue may need to be either resolved or managed to ensure that confusion does not dilute the effectiveness of the advocacy position.

A matrix of policies with clear direction on each sector's implementation responsibilities and the links between them may also be an option, if integration is not possible.

3.2 Developing an inspiring vision

At the dialogue event the group seemed to generally support the concepts behind the vision at the centre of the draft framework which was:

A food system that provides sustainably for the health and wellbeing of all Australians.

However, there was considerable discussion around the pros and cons of including the words 'and wealth' after 'wellbeing'. Several people felt that the concept is adequately covered by 'wellbeing' and that if the meaning was unclear to this group; it was likely to be misunderstood in other contexts. A key question becomes who is the audience for the vision? Is it government, the sector itself, the community? Several felt the suggested vision needed to be expressed in a more compelling way because an engaging vision is a most powerful tool in raising awareness and building commitment.

Feedback on the vision

On the basis of the feedback a new vision which attempts to address matters raised above is suggested:

A nutritious, secure and sustainable food supply for Australia's health, wellbeing and prosperity.

A guiding principle which could sit above issues related to specific areas of the food-related sector and not be subsumed by them, was also suggested in the feedback:

Access to nutritious food is a fundamental human right.

This has been included in the framework to test the response.

Comment

Future work may include considering whether articulating shared values such as this would provide a broad container for a range of different stakeholders and strengthen the overall advocacy position.

3.3 Need for high level government leadership and appropriate governance arrangements

It was also said that engaging the Prime Minister is critical if *'food is to assume its rightful and central place'* in national policy. This comment from the feedback reinforces the criticality of strong leadership and appropriate governance:

The key issue that stands out from everywhere that I have been moving is the lack of empowered leadership to take the whole agenda forward... It is important to develop a compelling argument about why this is important given the current Administrative Arrangement Order placing responsibility for food policy with DAFF and nutrition with DOHA⁴, possibly around the imperative of linking food production with health outcomes.

Many were keen for the policy to be managed from the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, rather than placing it with one of the line departments as occurred when Health had responsibility for the 1992 policy.

Anecdotal feedback from the UK, where responsibility for an integrated food policy - *Food Matters* - is centrally located, indicated that giving responsibility to a central department does not automatically lead to integrated implementation. It may simply lead to confusion. There must be very clear expectations about the implementation responsibilities of the other departments and of the sector if an integrated approach is to work. This is not simple or easy to achieve.⁵

As well, governance and reporting arrangements need to be designed to foster collaborative partnerships while maintaining accountability. Treasury involvement then becomes critical as collaboration becomes difficult for government departments when they are held accountable for funding through the expectations of departmental silos rather than for the outcomes of collaborative work. Other supports for an integrated approach could include a high level food advisory council drawn from across the sector. SIGNAL was cited as a good example.

A practical recommendation from the food sectors on governance arrangements is likely to strengthen the advocacy position.

3.4 Need for a tripartite strategy - political commitment, multi-sectoral support and community engagement

The comment was made that *'perhaps we expect too much of policy'*. Others mentioned that the content of the 1992 policy was very good but that *'it ran out of steam after the first program initiatives and evaluations.'* For example, agricultural and food researchers were not aware of the previous policy and politicians with responsibilities in the area may not have been briefed on the policy during the late 90s even though the policy was still current.

Real change requires broad ownership and incorporation of many different perspectives and interests. Policy itself may not be enough. For example, changes in drink driving practices have required political will, long term awareness raising, publication of compelling evidence, and cooperation from the liquor industry in conjunction with government policy and regulation.⁶

⁴ DAFF is the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry; DOHA is the Department of Health and Ageing.

⁵ This was not specifically mentioned during the dialogue but was derived from the pre-dialogue consultations.

⁶ A participant also mentioned the high rate of breastfeeding in Iran which is promoted by the government through community education on its benefits and coordinated with other supports such as Iranian employment law which protects and encourages women to continue breastfeeding until the child reaches two years.

Tensions between health and nutrition and some parts of the food industry were acknowledged, but not extensively explored during this dialogue. However, industry representatives saw collaboration as essential – *‘we are not the problem, we are part of the solution’*. The important contribution of industry representatives at the dialogue table was acknowledged and there appears to be an opportunity for engage further to develop new approaches to old difficulties.

Community engagement was referred to in the conversations around declining food confidence and the need to strengthen food citizenship. *‘There is a nutritional cacophony. Yet people are more confused than ever.’* This is also an area which will repay more detailed consideration.

4. Issues requiring more attention

This section covers

- Involving stakeholders not present at the dialogue
- Agreeing priorities and engaging government
- Building on evidence, other policy development initiatives and experience
- Strengthening collaboration across the sector.

4.1 Involving stakeholders not present at this dialogue

The need to involve other relevant stakeholders was raised in both the dialogue and the evaluation

We don’t have all the players here. We don’t have the epidemiologists or many industry representatives, or primary growers or economists. It can’t be food only.

It was suggested that outreach and consultation would be required with a range of other players including:

- Farmers’ organisations
- The food service industry, including the fast food business
- Key member of the food production and manufacturing industry
- Environmental scientists
- Consumers and nongovernment food and welfare organisations
- Other potential stakeholders such as food transport industry representatives, food economists and educators.

4.2 Agreeing priorities and engaging government

Dialogue participants were reluctant to consider prioritisation of outcomes at this stage. One reason given for this was that the integrated approach in its purest form is undermined by prioritisation. However, more pragmatic voices strongly suggested that advocacy without compelling arguments and clear priorities for government would be completely ineffectual. The need to show the urgency and importance of food was emphasised, as illustrated in this comment from the evaluation -

The leadership role of government is critically important. Food is subsumed amongst a lot of other issues. What are the challenges over the next twenty years that underpin the urgency of a food and nutrition policy? We now have the climate change challenge as well as the food security challenges. If it is not addressed it will have major repercussions. The focus should be on the food system and the health of it.

It was said that government was interested in costs and benefits and that the sector should be using available evidence to support the outcomes it was seeking; and areas where the sector's directions coincide with government agendas were identified as:

- Obesity (even though there is concern from some that the food conversation has been hijacked by the obesity debate)
- The preventative health agenda
- Indigenous health and nutrition
 - The lack of emphasis on food and nutrition in the Closing the Gap initiative was seen as a major lost opportunity
- Social justice and access to affordable food including
 - Increasing the food security of vulnerable groups such as the elderly, refugees and asylum seekers on arrival
- Climate change and sustainability

Two other key planks which attract government attention and are compatible with an integrated approach are:

- Innovation
- Partnerships.

It was suggested that concrete proposals and (where possible) hard evidence related to these matters would be more effective than statements of principle.

Comment:

Focussing on issues which are likely to attract government interest does not mean abandoning the integrated approach. For example, developing a case for the health, economic and social benefits of improved Indigenous nutrition in remote communities or the health and food security benefits of innovative sustainable farming methods, or the economic benefits of reducing obesity can promote and demonstrate the benefits of a cross sectoral integrated approach.

4.3 Building on evidence, policy development initiatives and experience

Food and agriculture related research was described as fragmented, and as previously mentioned, in the past it has not been linked to the national food and nutrition policy. This represents a huge missed opportunity, and if addressed could yield major benefits.

Participants felt there was an overall lack of data. In this context the proposed Health Risks Survey mentioned at the dialogue was welcomed as it would provide baseline data. People were also keen to research the costs of diet related ill health in Australia (and believed that there was credible data available which, although piecemeal, could be used to strengthen the advocacy argument).

Attachment 3 provides a list of known policy initiatives related to the food sector with due dates where these are known. These represent opportunities for the sector to target its influencing strategies to work in progress and to build on previous work where applicable.⁷

⁷ In addition, accessing the mapping of food related initiatives undertaken in the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry is also relevant as is the Food Strategy of the Australian Food and Grocery Council.

4.4 Strengthening collaboration across the sectors

It was pointed out that collaboration is difficult when *'we use the same words but we don't speak the same language.'* For example food security can mean different things when looked at from the international, national, local and individual levels. At the same time there was a clear message from industry –

There are lots of opportunities to work between the sectors and learn different ways of thinking and using different tools.'

Participants felt this would need more work and that it is important.

We need to keep this conversation going so that we understand each other and can work together better. We need an ongoing way of bridging the barriers.

Comment

There is an argument for developing some structure to support collaboration. An on-line information sharing medium for the sector could be a start.

5. A way forward

This section covers

- Advice to DAA and PHAA
- Next steps
- Epilogue

5.1 Advice to DAA and PHAA

The final advice given to DAA and PHAA members can be succinctly expressed as

- *'Keep this conversation alive'* across the sector and consult broadly to develop momentum for change
 - Consider establishing a mechanism for maintaining links across the sector
- Develop a compelling case on the benefits of investing in the integrated approach
 - Link the food and nutrition agenda to the government agenda
 - Don't reinvent the wheel
 - Learn from the experience of the 1992 policy implementation
 - Use the evidence and experience that is already available
 - Identify concrete examples of what can be done quickly and suggest these to government.
- Keep the message simple and direct
 - A one pager is ideal for government
 - Explain the problem the initiative is trying to solve and how it might compete with other priorities.
- Be persistent and don't give up.

5.2 Next steps

It was suggested that following the dialogue the next step should be for DAA and PHAA to set up a small but broadly based working party to provide advocacy leadership for an integrated approach to national food policy development and implementation.

Suggested tasks for DAA & PHAA are to:

- Identify and consult with key food players beyond health and nutrition about the benefits of and barriers to an integrated national policy
 - the draft policy framework may provide a useful and practical way of communicating the food-related sectors' position
- Articulate a compelling case for an integrated food and nutrition policy and communicate it to government and other key players
- Develop and implement an advocacy plan on behalf of and with the food and nutrition sectors which includes
 - objectives , tasks, roles, responsibilities and timelines
 - one suggested task was to provide practical advice to government on possible governance structures
 - a media strategy to support advocacy initiatives and to promote community engagement
 - a process for gathering available evidence to support the advocacy plan
 - development of a proposal ready for the pre-budget submissions in late 2009
 - links with as many other relevant policy initiatives and high profile events as possible, (eg the PHAA Food Futures Conference to be held in Canberra in April 2010)
 - a communication plan for keeping the food and nutrition sectors informed on progress, issues and opportunities.

5.3 Epilogue

This report has been an attempt to faithfully reflect the tone and intent of the dialogue on a new national food and nutrition policy held in Canberra on 18 June 2009.

The valuable contribution of everyone who participated in the pre-dialogue interviews, the dialogue itself and those who provided post dialogue feedback is very much appreciated. That contribution is one step towards bringing the combined professional knowledge, experience and strategic foresight of the Australian food sectors to bear on the food challenges that will be part of our shared future.

Attachment 1: Participant List



PARTICIPANT LIST

TOWARDS A NEW FOOD AND NUTRITION POLICY IN AUSTRALIA – A CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE FOR NEXT STEPS.

Anderson	Susan	Heart Foundation, National Director Healthy Weight
Annisson	Geoffrey	AFGC Deputy Chief Executive/Health, Nutrition and Scientific Affairs Director
Begley	Andrea	PHAA Food and Nutrition Special Interest Group
Byron	Annette	DAA Professional Services Manager
Capra	Sandra	DAA Fellow, Chairperson International Confederation of Dietetic Associations
Dixon	Jane	Fellow, National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health, ANU
Droulez	Veronique	Meat and Livestock Australia, Nutrition Manager,
Garside	Maree	DAA Communications and Marketing Manager
Griffiths	Trish	Go Grains, Executive Director
Guy	Trish	Sanitarium, Nutrition Manager
Hazeldine	Shaun	Red Cross,
Hewat	Claire	DAA Chief Executive Officer
Hirsch	Mikael	PISC Food and Nutrition Strategy
Lee	Amanda	Manager, Nutrition and Physical Activity, Health Promotion Branch, Queensland Health
McConell	Kathy	DAA Food and Environment Discussion Group
Moore	Michael	PHAA Chief Executive Officer
O'Kane	Gabrielle	PHAA ACT Branch President
Pennell	Sarah	Horticulture Australia Limited, General Manager Professional Services
Pollard	Christina	PHAA Food and Nutrition Special Interest Group
Riley	Malcolm	Dairy Australia, Nutrition Manager
Senior	Nicole	DAA Food and Environment Discussion Group
Walker	Melanie	PHAA Policy Officer
Williams	Peter	DAA Fellow
Yeatman	Heather	PHAA
Observers		
Brydges	Andrea	Bite Communications
Brignano	Sebastian	Red Cross
Gambrill	Greg	Sanitarium, Corporate Technical Manager
Kneipp	Erica	Department of Health and Ageing
Paul	Kate	DAA Professional Services Dietitian
Peachey	Cath	Department of Health and Ageing, Acting Assistant Secretary, Food and Healthy Living
Reeve	Leigh	DAA Project Dietitian
Souness	Richard	Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, General Manager, Food and Product Safety and Integrity
Facilitator		
Stephens	Lyn	Centre for Dialogue, ANU
Note taker		
Holbrook	Val	Centre for Dialogue, ANU

Attachment 2: Feedback and Evaluation Form

ANU Centre for Dialogue Towards a National Food and Nutrition Policy – 18 June 2009

Please underline or bold your response. Where a scale is provided, 5 is the most positive and 1 the least positive response

A. Participant's details

Were you a participant or an observer?

Are you willing to have your email address included with the participants list? Yes No

B. Dialogue report

1. To what extent does the report reflect the content of the dialogue?

1 2 3 4 5

Comment:

2. How useful is the report as a guide for future advocacy action?

1 2 3 4 5

Comment:

3. Can you suggest any changes to improve the draft food and nutrition policy framework (on page 5)?

4. How well does the draft vision express the aspirations of the sector?

1 2 3 4 5

Can you suggest a better alternative?

5. Please specify any other changes or additions you would like to see in the report.

C. Dialogue process

6. To what extent was dialogue the appropriate method to achieve the day's outcomes?

1 2 3 4 5

Comment:

7. Did you have adequate opportunity to express your views?

1 2 3 4 5

Comment:

8. Please rate the importance to you of the 'in-the-round' configuration.

1 2 3 4 5

Comment:

9. Do you have any comments on benefits or disadvantages of the 'in-the-round' configuration?

Comment:

10. Do you have any comments on how the relationship between participants and observers was managed?

Comment:

11. Please rate the facilitation provided overall

1 2 3 4 5

Comment:

D: Pre-dialogue administration

12. Is there anything more we could have done beforehand to better prepare you for the dialogue?

Comment:

13. Please rate pre-dialogue administration overall.

1 2 3 4 5

Comment:

E: General comments

14. Please provide any other comment which would enable us to improve the dialogue experience.

THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO PROVIDE THIS FEEDBACK.

Please return this form by 17 July 2009 to Lyn Stephens

By email: Lyn.stephens@anu.edu.au;

By post: Centre for Dialogue, College of Law, Building 5, Acton ACT 0200.

Attachment 3: Relevant Food and Nutrition Policy Initiatives

Weighing it up – Obesity in Australia	May 2009
National Preventative Health Taskforce Report.	Currently with the Minister for Health and Ageing.
National Primary Health Care Reform Taskforce Report	Report due July 2009
Systemic literature review to update the Dietary Guidelines	Final report due end January 2010
Revision of the Core Food Groups (1994)	Final report due July 2010