

The Food System, Diet and the Environment

Policy Position Statement

Key messages: Ecologically sustainable diets are protective and respectful of biodiversity and ecosystems, culturally acceptable, accessible, economically fair and affordable, nutritionally adequate, safe and healthy, while optimising natural and human resources.

Current food systems have contributed to environmental degradation and inequitable food distribution, overconsumption of foods in general (especially energy-dense nutrient-poor foods) and food waste.

Key policy positions:

1. A holistic and integrated Australian food and nutrition policy that considers the health, social, economic and environmental dimensions of the food system as an important population health priority should be developed.
2. The knowledge and expertise of Australian Indigenous peoples on food sustainability and food systems should be incorporated into policymaking decisions.
3. Ecological sustainability principles should be integrated within the Australian Dietary Guidelines (ADG).
4. Food supply, including agricultural production should align with the Australian Dietary Guidelines to support availability and affordability of healthy diets
5. Labelling should support consumer choice of a healthy and ecologically sustainable diet.
6. Food waste reduction measures, directed at retailers, food producers and consumers should be developed and implemented as part of a food and nutrition monitoring system.
7. Government, the public and the food industry should be made aware of the environmental impacts of the food system and the implications for health.

Audience: Federal, State and Territory Governments, policymakers and program managers, PHAA members, media.

Responsibility: PHAA's Food and Nutrition Special Interest Group (FANSIG) and Ecology and Environment Special Interest Group (EESIG)

Date adopted: 23 September 2021

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Note: This is one of two policies focused on the bi-directional relationship between the environmental and the Australian food system, and the changes needed to ensure that the food system is ecologically sustainable, and thus can provide nutritious, affordable and culturally appropriate food into the future.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the “Food System, Diet, and the Environment” Background paper as well as [other PHAA policy position statements](#) including: Global Warming, Climate Disruption, the Food System and Food Security; Food security for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples; Health Effects of Fossil Fuels; and Safe Climate.

PHAA affirms the following principles:

1. We have a responsibility to protect the planet for future generations.^{1, 2}
2. Global challenges of overweight and obesity, undernutrition (including stunting, wasting and micronutrient deficiencies) and climate change represent a Global Syndemic; these challenges coexist in time and place, interact with each other and have common systemic drivers.
3. Australian food and nutrition policy should support and enable food producers, processors, distributors, retailers, food service and other actors in the food supply to provide consumers with food that is both nutritious, reduces negative environmental impacts, and regenerates ecosystems.
4. Access to nutritious, safe, affordable and ecologically sustainable food is vital for the future health, prosperity and wellbeing of Australians.
5. Ecological sustainability principles should be included in all food and nutrition and chronic disease guidelines. Current national dietary guidelines are not compatible with long-term climate change commitments- Australia’s Dietary Guidelines would see a continued increase in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.³

PHAA notes the following evidence:

6. A healthy and sustainable diet includes: ⁴⁻⁷
 - Diversity – a wide variety of foods eaten
 - Not in excess of energy and/or nutritional requirements
 - Based around: tubers and whole grains; legumes; fruits and vegetables
 - Dairy products or fortified plant-substitutes eaten in moderation, and other calcium-containing plant foods
 - Meat, – particularly red and processed meat^{8, 9}- eaten sparingly, in amounts no greater than recommended, and all animal parts consumed.
 - Unsalted seeds and nuts
 - Fish and aquatic products sourced legally from sustainable fisheries with respect to stock levels of

- species
 - Limited consumption of ultra-processed foods, including sugary and fatty sweets, chocolates, snacks and beverages, that are intensively processed and primarily packaged.
 - Tap water in preference to other beverages, including plastic bottled water, to reduce plastic waste and further pollution of the oceans.¹⁰
7. Implementing this policy would contribute towards achievement of UN Sustainable Development Goals 3: Good Health and Wellbeing.

PHAA seeks the following actions:

Governance actions

8. A federal government commitment to the Paris Agreement for the 2030 target of zero emissions as well as a renewable energy target beyond 2020.
9. Reduced involvement of the agri-food industry, as well as seed, pesticide and fertiliser industries, in policymaking development and decision making.^{11, 12}
10. Ongoing investment in the food production sectors (agriculture, fisheries and horticulture), including financial support for producers utilising ecologically sensitive practices, and research and development that enable sustainable and ecologically sensitive practices.
11. Incorporate and promote a planetary health approach to the food system and nutrition that recognises the relationships between human health and the environment.

Supply driven actions

12. An enabling policy environment to support adoption of sustainable agriculture and food-processing practices, including investing in renewable energy, enhancing energy efficiency and demand reduction strategies as responses to climate change.
13. Inclusion of nutrition and health considerations in food supply policy and implementation, including production, processing, distribution and retail of foods aligned with the ADGs to support availability and affordability of healthy diets.
14. Further research on the environmental impact of specific foods in the Australian context, to guide food selection for a healthy and ecologically sustainable diet, as well as including power dimensions in policy considerations.¹³
15. Inclusion of Australian First Nations Peoples' in policy development and implementation, to prioritise the knowledge and expertise of Australian Indigenous peoples on food sustainability and food systems.

Demand driven actions

16. Promotion of a diet which is in keeping with international evidence-based characteristics of a healthy and sustainable diet.^{5, 14}
17. Development and adoption of ecologically sustainable healthy eating guidelines and ecological sustainability principles included in all food and nutrition and non-communicable disease guidelines, including the ADGs. Guidelines advising further reduction of red meat could reduce health inequalities and climate disruption.¹⁵

18. Better information for consumers on ecological sustainability as well as nutrition related parameters on food labels.

PHAA resolves to advocate for:

19. Holistic and integrated food and nutrition policies that consider the health, social, economic, and environmental dimensions of the food system.
20. Reduction of animal product consumption, particularly red and processed meat to within limits specified in the ADGs, by adopting a diet predominantly comprised of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and legumes, with small amounts of animal-source foods if desired.¹⁶ Populations, such as those suffering chronic food insecurity and micronutrient deficiencies, may need to maintain or in some cases increase their animal-source food intake.
21. Prioritisation of sustainability principles within the ADGs.
22. Labelling that supports consumer choice of a healthy and ecologically sustainable diet, such as better country of origin labelling.
23. Food waste reduction measures, directed at retailers, food producers and consumers, to be developed and implemented as part of a holistic food and nutrition policy
24. Stronger regulation of the agri-food industry, including more transparency over political donations and lobbying activities, as well as penalties associated with producing and marketing unhealthy and unsustainable food products.¹¹

(First adopted 2018, revised 2021)

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