

Second International Conference on Nutrition

Rome, 19-21 November 2014

Australian Statement for Plenary Session

It's been an honour for Australia to represent, with China and New Zealand, the interests of the Western and South Pacific regions in drafting the Rome Declaration on Nutrition and the Framework for Action.

These two documents, with Australia's full support, call for a more coherent and coordinated approach to malnutrition. They reflect that a voluntary, flexible approach is needed to ensure they can be used in a variety of national contexts.

This conference brings together, in policy terms, some important pillars of world nutrition; including better and more efficient agriculture, more flexible and efficient delivery of emergency food assistance, and healthier diets backed by better education and food regulation and safety.

Malnutrition is a truly global challenge shared by both developing and developed countries.

Australia is working internationally, including through last week's G20, to raise the profile of nutrition as a vital socio-economic issue. G20 leaders recognised that malnutrition is acting as a brake on the global economy, as well as individual potential. In Brisbane, leaders welcomed a new G20 Food Security and Nutrition Framework, which will help the world to respond better to these needs.

In the Indo-Pacific region, Australia supports better nutrition through our aid program. Our region is home to high rates of child undernutrition, such as stunting, and some of the highest obesity rates in the world. Some countries

face the ‘double burden of malnutrition’, grappling with both under- and over-nutrition at the same time. We are keen to ensure that these different nutrition challenges are given real consideration in the post-2015 agenda.

Australia is an active Member of the World Health Organization and regional coordinator for the Western Pacific, and we have been pleased to support the Organization’s work in leading global efforts to address malnutrition and prevent and control the incidence of non-communicable diseases.

Australia is also a major partner of FAO and the World Food Programme. The FAO is leading the world in grappling with food insecurity and its efforts to ensure that producers can more effectively and sustainably meet rising food needs. As Co-Chair of the FAO South West Pacific region, Australia is working with FAO to better assist countries in the Pacific region address their agriculture and food and nutrition security challenges. Next year, Australia will assume the Presidency of WFP’s Board. For countless millions the WFP is the pivot between life and death feeding 90 million people in distress and hunger each year, whether they are refugees sheltering from war, whether they are enduring famine or natural disaster, or if they are receiving or giving sustenance in the most difficult circumstances to combat diseases like Ebola. Australia has increased its multilateral funding to WFP but unless others do likewise, including the private sector, the most unpalatable decisions, even beyond cutting rations, will have to be made; with potentially dire human as well as regional security consequences.

In the meantime we are not neglecting our own domestic concerns. Most Australians enjoy good health and long life, underpinned by a healthy diet and lifestyle. However, we also share the ongoing nutrition dilemmas of many countries, in the form of relatively high levels of overweight and obesity, as well as a high level of diabetes. In 2008 the annual cost of obesity to Australia

alone, including health system costs, loss of productivity and carer's costs, was estimated to be US\$58 billion.

In line with the ICN2 agenda, we recognise the importance of a healthy diet at all ages and it is important that Australians are able to make healthy food choices. We pursue these objectives through the joint efforts of governments, NGOs, industry and public health advocates.

We recently announced a Health Star Rating system, which is a voluntary front-of-pack labelling scheme that provides an overall rating of the healthiness of packaged food products, to assist consumers to make healthier eating choices. The Australian Government will also continue to work with partners, including public health experts and industry, to reduce risk associated nutrients and increase positive nutrients in the Australian food supply. We are looking to expand this work further in the future to consider food portion sizes and physical activity initiatives.

The Rome Declaration and the Framework for Action provides us with globally relevant options to draw on in addressing the different challenges of malnutrition around the world and to navigate toward a healthier, more sustainable future.