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28th March 2008

Mr Graham Samuel
Australian competition and Consumer Commission
PO Box 1199
DICKSON ACT, 2602

Dear Mr Samuel

The Steering Committee for the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nutrition Strategy and Action Plan (NATSINSAP)* acknowledge and support the current ACCC Grocery Inquiry. This submission has been prepared by the NATSINSAP National Senior Project Officer, on behalf of the NATSINSAP Steering Committee.

For further information in relation to the NATSINSAP submission, please contact Ms Judith Myers on (03) 9321 1529 or at Judith.myers@heartfoundation.org.au.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Lea".

Traven Lea
Interim Chair
NATSINSAP Steering Committee

Submission to the ACCC Grocery Inquiry from the NATSINSAP Steering Committee on March 27th 2008

The Steering Committee for the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nutrition Strategy and Action Plan* (NATSINSAP) commends the current ACCC Inquiry into Food Prices. The following submission provides comment on the grocery issues paper in context of the current nutrition priorities impacting on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

This submission has been prepared by the NATSINSAP National Project Officer, with input provided by the state-wide public health nutritionists or equivalent level positions from the following member jurisdictions which are represented on the NATSINSAP Steering Committee:

Northern Territory Department of Health and Community Services

Queensland Health

South Australia Department of Health

Victorian Department of Human Services

National Heart Foundation of Australia

Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nutrition Background

For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people whether living in urban, rural or remote settings the availability and cost of healthy nutritious food is a core issue which underpins the poor health status and gap in life expectancy compared to non-Indigenous Australians.

In order to address this and provide a coordinated response at a national level the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nutrition Strategy and Action Plan (NATSINSAP) was endorsed by the Australian Health Ministers Conference in August 2001 and is a key component of the whole of population nutrition strategy, *Eat Well Australia: An Agenda for Action for Public Health Nutrition 2000-2010*¹.

The NATSINSAP broadly identifies 'food security and socioeconomic status, and 'food supply in remote and rural communities' as national action areas to improve the nutritional health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who currently number about half a million people in Australia².

¹ 'National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nutrition Strategy and Action Plan (NATSINSAP)', developed by the Strategic Inter-Governmental Nutrition Alliance of the National Public Health Partnership, 2001.

² Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004

Remote Food Security Issues

In 2006, 69% of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population were living in regional, remote or very remote areas of Australia, with the remaining 31% living in major cities³. However, with increasing remoteness, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people increases, such that in some very remote areas, they comprise up to 51% of the population⁴.

In remote areas, stores and takeaways are estimated to provide around 90-95% of all food that is consumed in the community^{5 6}. Store food tends to be expensive and offers a limited range of healthy choices, particularly so for perishable items such as fruit and vegetables. Results from 2006 Northern Territory and Queensland food basket surveys highlight the increasing cost of healthy food and the associated potential barrier to good health faced by all, and particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders living in remote areas.

The range and types of foods included in the Queensland 'Healthy Food Access Basket' (HFAB) and Northern Territory 'Market Basket Survey' represent commonly available and popular foods consistent with the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating⁷. The foods selected provide 70% of the nutritional requirements and 95-100% of the estimated energy requirements of a hypothetical family of six people for a two-week period. For cost comparison purposes, a number of less nutritious food items and tobacco items are also surveyed^{8 9}.

In 2006 it was found that the average cost of a healthy food basket was 29-33% more expensive in remote Northern Territory & Queensland communities than capital city supermarkets in Darwin and Brisbane respectively. Fruit and vegetables were on average 30-38% more expensive, compared with 'unhealthy foods' (cream filled biscuits, plain milk chocolate, ice cream, potato crisps, soft drink and meat pies) which were only 23% more expensive. This confirms that the cost of healthy foods is greater for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in remote areas. In fact up to 36% of family income has been reported to be needed to purchase foods in some remote communities¹⁰. This is double the 17% of income that the average Australian will spend on food¹¹. Basic healthy food items are also less likely to be available in very remote areas compared with less remote areas and cost more than 'less healthy' foods¹².

³ 4705.0 - Population Distribution, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2006

⁴ AIHW. Rural, regional and remote health: mortality trends (2nd Edition) 2007

⁵ Lee A, Bonson A, Powers J. The effect of retail store managers on Aboriginal diet in remote communities. *Aust NZ J Public Health* 1996; 20(2):212-214.

⁶ Nganampa Health Council, Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council Anangu Pitjantjatjara and all Community Councils on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands. Mai wiru. Process and policy. Regional Stores Policy and associated regulations for the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands. 2002. Alice Springs, NT, Nganampa Health Council.

⁷ Department of Health and Ageing. Australian Guide to Healthy Eating. 1998

⁸ Queensland Healthy Food Basket Survey 2006. Department of Health, Queensland Government

⁹ NT Market Basket Survey. 2006. Department of Health and Community Services, Northern Territory Government

¹⁰ NT Market Basket Survey. 2006. Department of Health and Community Services, Northern Territory Government

¹¹ Adelaide Healthy Food Basket: A survey on food cost, availability and affordability in five local government areas in metropolitan Adelaide, South Australia Alfonso Tsang, Margaret W. Ndung'u, John Coveney and Lisel O'Dwyer *Nutrition & Dietetics* 2007; **64**: 241-247

¹² Harrison M et al. The Increasing cost of the basic foods required to promote health in Queensland. *MJA* 2007;186:9-14

The availability of functional ‘health hardware’ such as working refrigerators, adequate food storage areas and adequate facilities to prepare and store food play a key role in supporting remote community members access food. Up to 26% of households have been identified as not having a functional refrigerator, and up to 82% as having inadequate facilities to prepare and store food in remote Indigenous communities in an Indigenous Community Housing Survey in the NT¹³.

Urban Food security issues

Problems of food access are not confined to remote areas. Urban Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people also experience problems of food access which are frequently related to socioeconomic issues. In a study conducted in Victoria, it was reported that 51% of Aboriginal families experienced food insecurity – meaning they had run out of food and could not afford to buy more¹⁴.

Relative cost of Healthy foods

The cost of healthier foods has increased even more than the cost of less healthy foods as demonstrated by comparisons of the HFAB with the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for foods in Brisbane. The average price of the Healthy Food Basket in Queensland rose 49% between 2000 and 2006 compared with a 32.5% increase in the CPI for food over the same period¹⁵. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experiencing financial difficulty, ready access to proportionately lower priced unhealthy foods that are typically high in sugars and fats is likely to further contribute to the burden of disease linked with poor diet.

Link between food costs, availability and health inequalities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Relative to the remainder of the Australian population, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience high rates of preventable chronic disease, notably type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and renal failure¹⁶ - all of which have poor diet as an underlying risk factor. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, especially those living in remote areas, are required to spend more of their income to access healthy foods than residents of urban areas, with healthy foods less accessible at times.

Further to issues of food access and availability, both poverty and social inequality are considered to underpin the health differential between the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and the remaining Australian population¹⁷.

¹³ Department of Health and Community Services. Annual Report 2004-05. Northern Territory Government

¹⁴ Adams K. Koori Kids’Ears and Health. A community report from Onemda VicHealth Koori Health Unit 2006

¹⁵ Queensland Healthy Food Basket Survey 2006. Department of Health, Queensland Government

¹⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. ABS Cat. No. 4704.0. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2005.

¹⁷ Devitt J, Hall G, Tsey K. Determinants of health. In: Condon J, Warman G, Arnold L, editors. The Health and Welfare of Territorians. Epidemiology Branch, Territory Health Services, NT Government, 2001: 9-18.

Recommendations

A recent National Nutrition Networks '*Good Tucker Good Health*' Conference was held in Alice Springs, 11-14 March 2008 and was attended by over 200 people working in the field of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nutrition. A number of recommendations have arisen from the conference presenters and delegates.

Recommendations with relevance to the ACCC enquiry are:

- That food security issues impacting on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in remote and non-remote locations are researched and reported and food security indicators are developed for routine monitoring and reporting nationally.
- Remote areas are included in a national food pricing enquiry with a plan for ongoing food price monitoring (national market basket survey) of food availability, accessibility and cost.
- Research, including an economic analysis is conducted to identify effective strategies of applying subsidies to achieve equity in costs and availability of basic foods including fresh fruit and vegetables for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This research should include, but not be limited to, subsidies on freight in remote settings and will include application of subsidies at critical life-stages such as pregnancy and lactation and early childhood.

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