

The Secretary
Standing Committee on Climate Change, Environment and Water
GPO Box 1020
Canberra City ACT 2601

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Inquiry into the ecological carrying capacity of the ACT and region

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission into this inquiry. In September 2009, a food dialogue was held in Canberra in September 2009, to bring together a diverse group of stakeholders from the ACT region to strengthen local food systems. From this dialogue a number of strategies were proposed to enable the development of local food systems, some of which involve government. Hence, this submission will make suggestions that require the support of the ACT government to achieve change. This submission addresses four parts of the terms of reference for this inquiry:

1a) The resources available to the ACT in terms of water, energy and food sourced from within the Territory and outside it;

1f) Effective measures for reducing the ACT's ecological footprint;

1g) The environmental, economic and social impacts of reduced resource consumption and a sustainable population.

1j) Any other relevant matter

The resources available to the ACT in terms of water, energy and food sourced from within the Territory and outside it.

One of the key long term strategies suggested by participants at the food dialogue was to advocate for a food capability, land and water audit of the ACT region to provide baseline data on the current food production capacity of the ACT region.¹ Another proposed strategy from this food dialogue was to advocate for a review of legal barriers to developing local food systems, particularly in relation to urban agriculture. Current urban planning laws do not allow space and opportunity for local agriculture and community gardens are currently restricted to unleased government land. Improving access to community gardens and other forms of urban agriculture in the ACT region can provide a variety of environmental, social and health benefits, such as reduced 'food miles', improved individual and community food security, social inclusion, improved nutrition and physical activity.^{2 3}

¹ ANU Centre for Dialogue, 2009, 'Food – back to the future? Outcomes of a dialogue on strengthening the local food system for community health and wellbeing – an opportunity to develop a fairer and more sustainable approach'.

² Armstrong, D. 2000. A survey of community gardens in upstate New York: Implications for health promotion and community development, *Health & Place*, 319-327.

³ Bartolemei et al. 2003. *A Bountiful Harvest: Community gardens and neighbourhood renewal in Waterloo*. Sydney: UNSW

Effective measures for reducing the ACT's ecological footprint

Currently, in NSW, there is the 'City to Soil Groundswell' project, funded by the NSW Environment Trust over three years. This is a project whereby organic waste is collected by local government and the waste is returned to farms as organic compost. Goulburn is one of the towns currently involved in this project. While empirical evidence of increase in farm yields is still being collected and any reductions in carbon emissions, there has been engagement by urban residents in the project, as they like the idea of organic waste going back to farms.⁴ A similar project in the ACT may be an effective measure for reducing the ACT's ecological footprint, given the impact that organic waste has on GHG emissions when disposed of in landfill.

Further investigation into the use of aquaponics and hydroponics would be worthwhile.

The environmental, economic and social impacts of reduced resource consumption and a sustainable population

Local food systems, such as community gardens, community supported agriculture and farmers' markets can help to build local economies, improve the environment through using more ecologically sound food production methods and improve social connectedness in communities.⁵ Hence, the committee might consider supporting these local food systems in planning processes. Access to farmers' markets in the ACT is limited, owing to it having only two locations, and each of them only trading on one day per week. Consideration should be given to public transport and active transport to these sites and to supporting an expansion of the times available for trading and other sites for farmers' markets. As mentioned, reducing barriers to expanding community gardens in the ACT region would have social and environmental benefits.

Any other relevant matter

A further suggestion to the committee is in relation to developing a food policy coalition. A food policy coalition is 'an inter-sectoral working group that is established to bring about improvements to the local food supply to improve and support improving food security.'⁶ Five possible functions of a food policy coalition are leadership, advocacy, networking, research and education. While improving food security is a major focus of a food policy coalition, the other benefits of improving the sustainability of food systems are also possible. I would also be pleased to address the committee in person should it be deemed helpful.

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The Canberra Food Alliance

⁴ Inside Waste Jan/Feb 2009. Clean organics gain groundswell, weekly newsletter, available at www.insidewaste.com.au

⁵ Feenstra, G. 1997. Local food systems and sustainable communities. *American journal of alternative agriculture*, 12 (1), 28-36.

⁶ 'Food Security Options Paper: A planning frame work for policy and practice interventions' developed by the NSW Centre for Public Health and Nutrition for the NSW Department of Health <http://www.cphn.biochem.usd.edu.au> accessed 22 September 09