



australian
food sovereignty
alliance

Creating an equitable, sustainable and resilient food future for all Australians

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Parliament House
Canberra
ACT 2600
Australia

By Email: senator.ludwig@aph.gov.au

27th May, 2011

Dear Minister

Food Policy Advisory Working Group

I am writing on behalf of the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance [AFSA], which represents twenty three affiliate organisations, to follow-up on our earlier request for participation in the National Food Policy Advisory Working Group (letter sent 31st March, 2011).

The Department responded to our request by phone on Tuesday 3rd May, providing further information on the Advisory Working Group. We understand that our requested representation on the Advisory Group is considered unnecessary because:

- The group is intended at this stage to be only representative of ‘food chain interests’; and
- An issues paper will be released shortly, to be followed by a wider consultation process in which we and our affiliates will be welcome to participate.

Be assured that the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance, and our affiliates, will actively participate in the broader process and look forward to the release of the issues paper.

However, after discussion amongst our members, we have decided to repeat our request for immediate representation on the Advisory Group. Our reasons for this repeated request are the need for the community sector to be engaged at this stage in framing:

1. The issues of fair food and farming that are of critical and urgent importance to all Australians, not only those operating supply chains, particularly in light of climate change, increasing energy costs and the irreversible depletion of indispensable, non-renewable resources. Appropriate framing of the Advisory Group’s scope and processes is therefore essential, so that the most pressing issues are prioritised and dealt with as soon as possible.
2. A full and accurate assessment of our food system, including how, where, when and by whom our food is provided, is necessary for the design and implementation of longer-term policy and planning, including improved assessment of Australia’s food vulnerability, and of potential responses. With only large retail and commodity interests being currently represented, many key issues and actions are likely to be overlooked. For instance, AFSA’s members across Australia would bring considerable knowledge and expertise to identifying and harnessing independent food sources.

3. The decisions made as to who represents 'food chain interests' and how this justifies community exclusion. AFSA represents many members of emerging, resilient, agro-ecologically oriented food production and supply systems; which we contend must be central to all considerations relating to sustainable food chains.

Our concerns about the lack of openness and transparency in the Food Policy Advisory Group's operations

As you personally chair this group, it will be in a position to play a critical role in the development of national food policies. We have a legitimate interest in the Advisory Group's discussions; so we hope that you will appreciate our dissatisfaction with our requests for the minutes from the meetings being ignored.

We commend you for accepting the complex task of developing a National Food Plan; and we recognise that there are competing interests and perspectives that need to be managed. However, we do not consider that this situation constitutes justification for excluding those, such as the members of our Alliance, who represent the public interest. Designing a responsible and effective national food policy is a matter of critical national importance that poses great risks as well as opportunities; and without adequate community representation this goal is unlikely to be achieved.

Furthermore, surely it is obvious that this vital goal can never be achieved by including only those with vested commercial interests. If equity of opportunity is to be attained, it is essential that the principles of access, participation, transparency and accountability be adopted from the outset.

Therefore, the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance again respectfully requests that our representative be included in the Food Policy Advisory Working Group. We also ask for the minutes of the two meetings of the Group held to date.

We look forward to hearing from you,

Yours sincerely

Nick Rose
National Coordinator, Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance

Cc: Hon Dr Mike Kelly, Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Senator Barnaby Joyce, Shadow Minister for Regional Development, Local Government & Water
Hon John Cobb MP, Shadow Minister for Agriculture and Food Security
Hon Tony Windsor MP
Hon Rob Oakeshott MP
Hon Bob Katter MP
Senator Christine Milne
Senator Rachel Siewert
Senator Nick Xenophon
Senator Bill Heffernan
Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network
Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network
Australian Farmers Markets Association (150 farmers markets across Australia)
Biodynamic Agriculture Australia

Canberra Food Fairness Alliance
Carbon Coalition
Food Alliance (Victoria)
Food Connect Foundation
Food Irradiation Watch
Friends of the Earth Australia
Gene Ethics
Greenpeace Australia, True Food Network
Healthy Soils Australia
Lock the Gate Alliance
Mothers Are Demystifying Genetic Engineering (MADGE)
Organic Federation of Australia
Public Health Association of Australia
Queensland Conservation Council
Resources Consulting Services
Slow Food Australia
South Australian Organic & Biodynamic Alliance
Sustain Queensland
Sydney Food Fairness Alliance
Sydney Organic Gardens Pty Ltd
Tasmanian Community Gardens Network