LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON CLIMATE CHANGE, ENVIRONMENT AND WATER

(Reference: Inquiry into the ecological carrying capacity of the ACT and region)

Members:

MS M HUNTER (The Chair)
MS M PORTER (The Deputy Chair)
MR Z SESELJA

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

FRIDAY, 21 OCTOBER 2011

Secretary to the committee:
Ms S Salvaneschi (Ph: 6205 0136)

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

WITNESSES

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Amended 9 August 2011

The committee met at 10.02 am.

PEARSON, DR DAVID, Associate Professor in Marketing, and Foundation Chair of Sustainability Development and Food Security Research Cluster, University of Canberra

THE CHAIR: Good morning. I declare open this ninth public hearing for the inquiry into the ecological carrying capacity of the ACT and region. I would like to welcome Dr David Pearson, Associate Professor in Marketing, and Foundation Chair of the Global Studies and Sustainable Food Research Cluster at the University of Canberra. Dr Pearson, I remind you of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement that is before you on the table, on the blue card. Could you confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement?

Dr Pearson: Yes, I do, thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Would you like to start by making an opening statement?

Dr Pearson: Certainly. I am both a resident of Canberra—a relatively new resident of Canberra—and I am employed as an academic at the University of Canberra. As a new resident, it is interesting to make the observation that I chose to move to Canberra with my family, and that has been a very enjoyable experience. I feel I am still in my honeymoon phase at the university and living in Canberra. The reasons we chose to live in Canberra relate to the fact that we were looking for a school for teenage children, we were looking for a pleasant place to live and, indeed, two careers. Certainly Canberra has delivered on those.

Within my role at the University of Canberra, I teach in advertising and branding. So I am really interested in consumers and how we can influence consumers. My research interests focus around how we can engage more consumers in making healthy and sustainable dietary choices. So it is, from my point of view, a great opportunity to share with the committee some of my thoughts that have emerged from research and publications over the last 10 years. Thank you for that opportunity.

In relation to the committee's concerns about ecological impact, it is really important to note that the food system is a significant contributor to that, at over 20 per cent of the ecological footprint. If we thought about environmental impact from other perspectives, such as carbon footprint, we would find it was around 20 per cent as well. If we thought about it in terms of land use, we would find that agriculture in Australia occupies about 60 per cent of our landscape. Indeed, it uses about 70 per cent of our water. So the food system is a very important component of our natural environment.

In addition, it is important to note that the food system is actually a very complex system. It has a supply chain running from producers through processors through to retailers and ultimately to consumers. Indeed, there are system outputs that are very important as well. The system provides a range of social, economic and environmental outputs. So it is a very complex system to understand. One of the advantages, or disadvantages, depending on how you look at it, of that complexity is

the fact that there are many players involved and there are many opportunities and many points of intervention for governments and other interested bodies to influence that system.

I have benefited from reading previous submissions and the transcripts. I would like to give a brief overview of those and certainly add my contributions along the way. I am of the firm belief that population is the most dominant and significant driver of our ecological impact. A secondary source of impact is the level of consumption associated with that population. Indeed, I am strongly of the view that our societies throughout the world, particularly our affluent Western societies, will have to contract the level of consumption. So there is a necessity to reduce consumption and certainly to focus that consumption towards what we call low intensity consumption experiences.

Green growth is one way of accommodating that sort of concept and the resource intensity. As an example of that, let us look at consuming more services; go and have a pilates massage rather than going off and buying a fashionable new T-shirt, because of the resource implications of that. So I emphasise that there is that necessity for a contraction. There is also a necessity for a convergence on a global scale—a convergence where we see the resources more equally shared throughout the countries of the world and in those countries of the world. So those two concepts, that couplet, contraction and convergence, to me are very important.

When we are thinking about the food system, there is no doubt about it: we are coming towards the end of an era, indeed a century, where we have benefited from cheap energy, cheap fossil fuel. That has two benefits for agriculture. The first of those is transport, so it is actually relatively cheap economically to move goods around the world. In addition to that, we use a lot of energy associated with creating artificial fertilisers, which have enabled agriculture to increase its yields on the farm.

When I am thinking about food, I think we can create some polarities, some distinctions, within food. One of those is the concept: what does food do in our society? Is food simply a source of fuel? And if it is a source of fuel, what does that mean? It is just a necessity—and it is a necessity. But in addition to that, at the other end of the extreme, we could say that food is actually part of the reason for living. Food has a whole lot of social and cultural enjoyments attached to it. I think that is an important distinction to keep in mind when we are talking about the food system.

When we come down to the diet, the specific foods that are eaten, there are no universally accepted views as to what is the best diet. Different cultures have evolved, survived and indeed prospered on significantly different diets. In a country like Australia, we tend to think of the most important dietary contribution as being health. Indeed, when we are talking about the sustainability of the diet, health is a precondition for that sustainability.

If we think about how we access food in our society, there are two broad streams or components of the food system that we access food from. The first is the food that we prepare and consume at home. The majority of that comes from supermarkets. It is my view that supermarkets are a phenomenally efficient logistics network. It is absolutely incredible what they can do. They can supply 30,000 or 40,000 different product lines

in a very convenient, low-cost manner. Indeed, a supermarket is purely a reflection of consumer preferences. The supermarket has no loyalty and no allegiance to any particular product or production system. So if you want to know what consumers are interested in, go into a supermarket, because if it is not selling, it does not stay on the shelf. I will come back to supermarkets later.

In addition, we have food that is eaten away from home. Often this area is not looked at as intensely as the food at home. Interestingly, the food away from home is the biggest area of growth. More and more people in Australia are eating food away from home. This ranges from takeaway food through to restaurants through to what I call more institutional catering environments. So when we are looking at the whole diet, and indeed the whole food system, it is very important to incorporate both the food at home and the food away from home and components of it.

When we are talking about the environmental impact of the food system, it is important that we focus on the big-ticket items, the items that are going to have a big impact. For example, it is unlikely that a few coffee beans from Far North Queensland or Guatemala are going to have a big impact on the sustainability of the system. What we are more interested in is the staples, where the bulk of the diet comes from.

We could simplify that and say that in Australia basically we get protein from red meat. Protein builds us and gives us size. Carbohydrates, which give us energy, basically in Australia come from wheat and to a lesser extent potatoes. Vitamins keep us healthy, and most of those come from fresh fruits and vegetables.

I know the focus of the inquiry is related to the region. When we are thinking about the region, there will be a whole lot of trade-offs associated within the food system. Those trade-offs are going to link consumer preferences and environmental impacts. I note previous submissions have made a distinction regarding food security—that is, whether we are going to have enough of the right types of food at the right price. And a region like the ACR has a lot of financial capacity to buy in supplies of food. When we talk about food sovereignty or food self-sufficiency, we are actually talking about the capacity of that region to provide the food that is consumed within that region.

Thinking about the region, we are really moving towards the production of food and the supply of that food through to the consumer, in the place that is close to where people live. In an academic sense, that is often referred to as urban or peri-urban agriculture. In Australia we would struggle to deliver five per cent of our total food intake from urban and peri-urban agriculture. In contrast, China—a totally different cultural context—produce around 80 per cent of their food close to where the people live.

In addition, when we are talking about the regional food system, it is important to make a distinction between the commercial end of the market, so the businesses that exist in the market, and private activities. At the commercial end we certainly have some very interesting boutique niche market suppliers in Canberra—a fascinating range of them. One that I find particularly interesting is the fresh fruit and veg supply chain that has been developed, which starts on a farm called Gleann na Meala and then comes through to two retail outlets called Choku Bai Jo. That is an example.

We also have farmers markets. We now have two in Canberra. They are a really interesting phenomenon. One of the powerful things that are not often talked about is the fact that they actually act as an incubator. They are actually an opportunity for people to take the first steps into the commercial world. If they are successful and they remain motivated, there are opportunities for them to expand and move into bigger activities.

We then come down to more of the private activities. These tend to be non-commercial, so there are not a lot of goods and services sold. We talk about community gardens. Community gardens have the potential to produce food but most of them actually focus on developing people, so growing people rather than growing food. They have an important role to play but it is not so much associated with food production. We have gardens, the gardens that exist around where people live, and they have multiple uses—pleasure, recreation and the production of food.

Then, of course, we have some new and exciting activities associated with guerrilla gardens, where people plant things, often food, on public space, which could be the verge near where they live. There are some fascinating examples, even just up the road in Sydney, in some of the inner suburbs. Originally they were seen as being a bit of a nuisance; now they are seen as being very attractive by not only the residents but the councils who are responsible for that land.

That was all I had prepared to say. I would welcome questions and I have a number of things that I am going to try and slide into the conversation as we go.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. You did cover, I guess, the amount of food that goes into landfill. There have been a number of studies done over time. Our own ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment commissioned some research which showed that Canberrans have an average ecological footprint of 9.2 global hectares per person and food accounts for six per cent of that footprint. We also looked at the waste streams back in 2003 in Canberra, and 38 per cent of all landfill garbage was food and kitchen waste. The Australia Institute, I think in 2005, came out with a report that it was around $30 a week for each household in wasted food. I just wanted to know whether you have any thoughts on how we can change that situation, where we might be able to build better systems and facilitate people to source sustainable food and waste it less or dispose of it in more environmentally friendly ways. How do you think we might be able to do that?

Dr Pearson: I have recently completed some research where I looked at the top 10 things that we could do in Canberra to improve the sustainability of our diet. Do you want me to give you the list?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Dr Pearson: The high priority areas would be reducing red meat consumption, reducing consumption of dairy products and reducing consumption of junk food—remembering that we are talking about health and sustainability. Junk food obviously adds to part of the enjoyment of life but it does not add a lot to health. The fourth thing on the top priority list was waste. I will just quickly run through the next six lower priority issues and then come back to the top four.

The next six were increased consumption of seasonal fresh fruits and veg; increased consumption of local; increased consumption of organic; increased consumption of sustainably caught fish, which is an important area; reduced energy consumption associated with purchasing and cooking the food in the household; and, finally, reducing the use of bottled water, given the fact that we have an alternative. The University of Canberra earlier this year actually implemented a water-bottle-free campus, which was a pretty exciting initiative. Just as an aside, one of the reasons we prioritised that was because it was a way in which we could engage everyone in a sustainability issue. It was seen as being very empowering because of that capacity.

I will come back to the top priority list, the top four. I have done some research on a group of consumers in Canberra whom I would consider to be pioneers, the leaders. These people, I would think, have the capacity financially and the knowledge to act. These people basically said: "I'm not interested. Don't touch meat and dairy. I actually want to keep that. I don't care what message you give me. I'm going to be immune to that message. It is part of the way I live and part of my life and it's important to me." It is culturally ingrained and it is a habit that is going to be very hard to shift. Interestingly, when I talked about waste—reducing waste and reducing their consumption of junk food—the vast majority of them said, "Yes, I would think about doing more of that, being more environmentally friendly."

I would encourage the ACT government and the councils in the region to really think about this. Is there something big they could do in reducing food waste? By way of example, in the UK they had a program running called "love food hate waste", which the New South Wales government has franchised and is currently running. I would love to see that modified for the ACT. I think that would be a very powerful way of reducing food waste.

THE CHAIR: What are some of the aspects of that campaign?

Dr Pearson: I will use this as an opportunity to incorporate something else I wanted to say. There is this concept called social marketing. A lot of social marketing emerged out of health and trying to improve health behaviours in society. Increasingly, social marketing, which uses mainstream, aggressive, full-on commercial marketing techniques to achieve social good, is being used for sustainability—so for encouraging more sustainable behaviours.

There is a version of this which is called community-based social marketing. The guys associated with this have come up with a package of case studies, as well as action items, to embed behaviours and to think about those behaviours at a community level. The love food hate waste program runs down that path. What you are looking for is the leaders, the innovators, the influencers at a community level who are game to adopt the behaviours and then other people are going to follow them. So you try and create interest. You try and create a buzz around this behaviour. At one level that is just a conventional advertisement, saying, "Hey, there's something going on over here," creating an awareness, right through to people becoming curious—that sort of desire—and ultimately the facilitation of action to have the desired behavioural change.

One of the important things about these behavioural change initiatives is to ensure that they are embedded and continued and that you redefine the habits. So you are looking not only for these change agents within your community; you are also looking at opportunities for intervention. One of them—as a new resident I can say this—is that new resident. A new resident arrives in Canberra and they have no habits. So they are totally open to ideas. There is a great opportunity. That is the point of intervention. There is less point in trying to convince people who have been here for a long time to change their routines and behaviours. It is much more powerful if you can get that new resident and set them up with behaviours.

MS PORTER: I am interested in that statement that you just made, Dr Pearson. You said that when you arrived here you had no habits. I would question that. I do not know how old you are, but I would—

Dr Pearson: Old enough to have habits, anyway.

MS PORTER: Certainly you are much younger than me, but I would imagine that you and your partner and your children have got fairly ingrained habits. Your eating habits are not suddenly going to become blank when you cross the border to live in the ACT. Therefore, can you explain that statement a little bit more to me? I am not denying that you think it is valid. I just wondered if you could give me a little bit more information about that.

Dr Pearson: Certainly, that would be a pleasure. Thank you for asking the question because it is valuable to unpack what I was referring to there. I actually came from the UK. I am from Australia originally but I came from the UK to live in Canberra. You are right; I have a whole lot of culturally acquired habits in relation to what I think is acceptable food, what I think is healthy food and how that food should be prepared and eaten and so forth.

What I was thinking about was more the habits associated with where I purchase, the specific food items I purchase, how I process those food items in the household and what I do with waste, for example. Do I recycle or not? Do I separate? I guess that was the opportunity that I was pointing out. That was why I was suggesting that a whole lot of those habits are not established and, therefore, it is an opportunity to influence those habits in ways that the various stakeholders think are positive.

MS PORTER: My other question was around the financial aspects. You talked a lot about the fact that these people that you interviewed said, "Look, these are no-go areas for me." There was the red meat and the dairy products and then you talked to them about waste. They were more inclined to come on board with the messages around junk food and waste. Were you asking them any questions around the financial implications of their behaviour—for instance, how much it cost them to go and purchase food that they were going to throw away?

Dr Pearson: The short answer is no. This was asking them about their attitudes and opinions rather than trying to force them towards a more realistic situation, such as a choice experiment where they might have to choose, or actually observing their behaviour in the marketplace. There is a big journey, yet there is a lot of linkage on that journey towards actual behaviour.

One of my PhD students is looking at red meat consumption and at what actually happens in the household. She has done a series of case studies and has now got a survey out there in the marketplace. She is looking at not only how much they consume—because, from a dietary point of view, our average consumption of red meat is higher than we need—but also what they waste. Certainly, monetary issues are real—

THE CHAIR: It is about our sustainability measures, Dr Pearson.

Dr Pearson: Correct. When we are talking about food, there are two observations I would make in relation to finance. Firstly, there is a social equity issue about food around the world, even within an affluent city like Canberra. Most people take the view—and research supports this—that people have a poor diet or an inadequate diet or not enough food because they are financially poor. There is that very real issue of solving the poverty problem for them.

Moving outside that group of people, we tend to be fairly immune to price differences when it comes to food. The reason for that is that food is actually a relatively cheap item for most people in the world. We tend to prioritise those foods that we desire, those culturally acquired food habits—apart from bananas when they go to $15 a kilogram, which is a recent example. Small price movements—the difference between $2 and $4 a kilogram—does not have a big impact on the demand for products.

One opportunity would be to actually have higher priced products in the marketplace which would then be valued more by customers and would then lead to less waste. I know that is counter to a whole lot of other trends, but I think it is important to be aware of the potential for price increases to have benefits. Certainly, a lot of the work around wastage and food waste and thinking about why consumers are keen to engage in that sort of behaviour points towards the fact that the easiest message to communicate is not the environmental benefit of food wastage; it is just the fact you are wasting your money.

THE CHAIR: You have talked there about one way of helping individuals shift their diets to more sustainable ones. I guess it is a price factor one that you have talked about—increase the price and they value it more and there will be less wastage. I am assuming also there will be less consumption because of the cost?

Dr Pearson: Yes.

THE CHAIR: There have been campaigns around this idea of reducing, for instance, red meat. It is around having one meat-free meal.

Dr Pearson: Meat-free Monday.

THE CHAIR: That is right. What about those sorts of campaigns? Are they effective? Have you got any evidence to show that there is an impact from those campaigns?

Dr Pearson: If we are talking about red meat consumption, there is the issue of over-

consumption. There is a good opportunity to say, "Look, it's personally embarrassing that Australia is the most obese nation on earth if you're looking at food waste." Eating too much is a source of waste as well as what might be thrown out.

Back to red meat consumption more specifically, I think there is the opportunity to substitute different red meats. Certainly, red meat that comes from intensive production facilities—feedlots being an example—is very expensive to the environment, particularly if it comes from an animal that produces methane, so the ruminants, sheep and cattle. We have an opportunity in Australia to increase the consumption or substitute some of that red meat from beef and sheep with red meat from kangaroos.

What is really interesting is the fact that we do have a controlled harvest of kangaroos in Australia. Most of that meat goes into the pet food supply chain. A small amount, about a third of it, goes into the human food supply chain. Guess where most of that goes? Of that 30 per cent, 24 per cent goes to Europe and only six per cent is consumed in Australia. From an environmental point of view, that is just mad. It is really interesting because to me it demonstrates the cultural significance. The impact of culturally acquired habits is huge.

MS PORTER: We do not like to eat our kangaroos.

THE CHAIR: You talked before about the co-benefits of raising these issues. There is the environmental benefit, but, as you talked about, there are the health benefits from this as well. Could you give us some of your thoughts around key messages? Are there particular demographic groups that should be targeted around this? Where should those messages be communicated?

Dr Pearson: If we are thinking about this from a communication challenge, who makes the decision? There is normally one person doing the shopping, and research in Australia shows that around 70 per cent of the shopping is done by women and about 30 per cent by men. They are the people who are making the decision in the supermarket but they are influenced by other people; they are certainly influenced by the people they are cooking for. So we are talking about a household decision-making environment here. That is the level of analysis and the point that one should think about.

I sense that the food away from home market is another challenge. I think the biggest area of opportunity in the food away from home market, for government at least, is the idea of public procurement. So it is about really pushing sustainability goals into the contracts for public procurement. An example, again from the UK, is that they have the food for life program there. To get the gold standard, the highest standard within their system, 70 per cent of the food supplied must be fresh, 50 per cent must be local and 30 per cent must be organic. So that is one way of creating a metric, a framework, around thinking about how to improve the health and sustainability of the system.

While I am there on organics, I noticed in previous submissions and some of the oral testimony that there was great confusion about what "organic" is. If I may indulge you, in Australia we have certified organic food. There are seven organisations that are

licensed and able to certify organic food. That represents about $1 billion worth of sales in Australia and about one per cent of the market. Six out of 10 people say that they buy organic food. The interesting thing about organic food is the fact that it is the dominant system out there where there is a direct connection between what the consumer can see on the packaging through to the whole supply chain back to the producer. So it is the most dominant communication, the most dominant label or the most dominant brand in terms of giving consumers a choice and in saying, "You can purchase this product and you're supporting a certain type of system that happens to be focusing on health, ecology, fairness and care."

Consequently, the organic food system is often used as an exemplar for a more environmentally sustainable system, by the United Nations and right down to local governments. There is fraud in the system. The organic food movement works really hard to maintain the credibility of its brand. From a marketing perspective, I think it is really interesting that it exists. All it does is reflect consumer preferences. There is a group of consumers for whom that is important. You could argue that this is just an example of the wide horizon of choice that is provided to consumers.

MS PORTER: From your experience, Dr Pearson, with regard to this purchasing around organic food, you did mention before the farmers market, for instance, as another choice. People can go to the farmers market rather than to their supermarket for their fresh fruit and vegetables, or other products. Or they might not go to the fresh food markets, for instance; they will go to the farmers market. In your research have you picked up whether or not people are very careful in selecting those products or do they just believe that because something is labelled that way, it must be so? Did you go down to that depth?

Dr Pearson: Absolutely. One of my former PhD students and I have done a whole lot of work around this area. Often we purchase products with a belief that may not be supported by the facts, so there is confusion out there. Some people think that "free range" means "organic". So when it comes to purchasing, say, chicken meat or eggs, but particularly chicken meat, a lot of people get confused. So the expert knowledge that some people have is not reflected in the wider marketplace, and certainly sometimes the decisions are actually made on a limited amount of knowledge.

There are farmers markets in the world where everything there is actually organic because that is a requirement, and there are farmers markets in the world where the stallholders are actually associated with the farm because that is a requirement. The farmers markets we have in Canberra have neither of those. With respect to the reasons people go there, they are not being misled. They might believe it is all organic but there is nowhere in the organisation of the market or what is actually presented at the stalls to say that it is organic.

So why do people go to farmers markets? It is because they enjoy it and because it makes sense in their world and in their lifestyle; it is appropriate to them. My sense is that farmers markets, Choku Bai Jo and all of these complementary food systems actually complement where we get most of our food from, which is global sourcing by the supermarkets and the food service sector. As such, they actually provide perhaps a pleasurable alternative to the convenient but dull supermarket-type shopping. So they have a role to play, but when it comes to the totality of our diet they are actually quite

small.

Can I add there, linking it across to supermarkets, that in the UK supermarkets are starting to supply local food. Why? Because consumers want it, and they have worked out a way. Even within their global logistics network, they have worked out a way of sourcing stuff regionally. So it is grown and processed regionally and it is put into their regional shops. There is nothing within the supermarket business model that stops them doing that. It is quite a powerful and flexible business model in that sense.

What do I mean by "local food"? Local food is the reduction of food miles. We do not have a legal definition and we certainly do not have a common definition of what local food is. Some people refer to local as a whole country, some people refer to it as a state, some people refer to it as within 50 kilometres. But I like the concept, if you are thinking about local food, to say that it is a direction to be heading in. So it is making the food supply system more local. If it used to come from Queensland, can you get it from New South Wales, and progressively take steps in that direction.

MS PORTER: Obviously some products cannot be grown in this climate.

Dr Pearson: Absolutely.

MS PORTER: So they will continue to need to be imported if people continue to eat them, or want to eat them.

Dr Pearson: Absolutely.

THE CHAIR: You talked before about food and what it takes to grow and deliver that food. That was around energy, water and so forth. Of course, part of that, when you are talking about supermarkets particularly, is packaging. Also when you are talking about sustainable food consumption, that is a factor, as I understand it, in what you are consuming at the end of the day.

Dr Pearson: Yes.

THE CHAIR: What do you think could be readily done to make it easier for people to make choices about sustainable food when they go to their supermarket? How can they start to influence and have this change around the over-packaging that we seem to be facing?

Dr Pearson: Certainly packaging is a significant issue in that most of it finishes up in the waste stream. It is very hard to recycle a lot of it. Interestingly, it is not in the top 10. That is not to say one should not pursue it but I do not think it is one of the priority areas.

THE CHAIR: Is that because of lack of awareness? People just do not—

Dr Pearson: Sorry, the top 10 is created by potential to have impact.

THE CHAIR: Okay.

Dr Pearson: So it is actually saying that packaging is not that significant when we look at the whole food system. However, I think it is a very visible component of the whole food production and consumption experience, and it is an area that should be looked at. From a communication, branding and marketing perspective, in the next five to 10 years we are going to see food supply companies start to label their products as environmentally friendly.

For example, we have the Heart Foundation tick, which is a very visible, very high recognition brand out there, and it is associated with health: "This product is good for your heart." We are going to see the same. We are going to see the equivalent of a green tick. Organisations are going to put the green tick on and say, "This is an environmentally friendly choice." That may relate to the fact that it is kangaroo meat and not beef, or it may relate to the packaging: "This packaging can be recycled." "This has minimal packaging." "This product has no packaging." That is possible.

Packaging performs a number of functions. It is often necessary for product protection in the supply chain, and it is a very powerful and very important communication between the prospective customer and the supplier of that product when they are making a choice. That is one of the reasons we see what we might feel is excessive packaging—not so much in supermarkets but certainly in a lot of the other consumption experiences—where there is a big box with a small container in it. It is because, from a marketing perspective, it makes sense to invest that extra money in the bigger box so that it is much more visible in—

THE CHAIR: Has greater influence.

Dr Pearson: the purchase situation. It is what we call point-of-purchase advertising.

THE CHAIR: When you talk about moving towards this green tick, with the Heart Foundation's tick, it is an independent organisation that goes in and does an assessment before someone is allowed to use that Heart Foundation tick. In fact, I understand that a company recently had the tick withdrawn.

Dr Pearson: Which is interesting.

THE CHAIR: Which is quite interesting, particularly in light of your comments earlier about junk food. Where do you see this coming from? Is this going to be an independent group or is this going to be something that manufacturers take on themselves? How likely is it just to become "greenwash" rather than something real?

Dr Pearson: The recent federal government inquiry into food labelling stated quite clearly that they did not see it as their role to implement what they call social values information on food products. They feel that it is up to the marketplace to develop it, if it wants to. I think that because of the competitive forces out there in our industry, and certainly within our food supply industry, it is unlikely to emerge from a supplier. It is more likely to emerge from a retailer. So what we are going to see is one of our big supermarkets start implementing it. If we look at who has the power in our food supply chain, it is the supermarkets. They own that interface with the customer, and they are the ones who probably have the biggest vested interest in improving the perception of them being an environmentally friendly, nice organisation. So they are

going to implement it for their benefit, for their credibility, to increase their brand equity.

MS PORTER: How would they be able to justify putting their tick on a particular item, because they would not have produced that item themselves?

Dr Pearson: The supermarket would have to undertake, if you like, the audit of the supply chain and own the criteria for that.

MS PORTER: It would be a fairly expensive exercise then.

Dr Pearson: Yes and no. They already know an awful lot about what happens. From a health perspective we have two levels of health. One is: does this stuff make me sick? From that perspective we have huge government legislation implemented by Food Standards Australia New Zealand that actually has a massive audit trail. So there is a lot of knowledge already and it would be a matter of having another component in that supply chain. The other aspect of health is not whether it is going to make me sick but whether it is going to enhance my ability to live and protect me from diseases. So it would be additional work but they may consider it worthwhile.

We have seen this in supermarkets around the world. In the UK supermarkets are a very competitive sector for the big chains and their environmental credentials are part of their brand image. So they do push it quite hard and they force that back down the supply chain.

THE CHAIR: I wanted to touch on community gardens. You mentioned this in your opening statement.

Dr Pearson: Yes.

THE CHAIR: I think it was along the lines that it is more about the community aspects, if you like. Obviously people are growing their own food and taking it home and consuming it. It is not about producing food in a large-scale way. Could you talk a little bit about whether you think the community gardens do provide that community place? Is it a part of awareness raising about food—the importance of fresh food and food that has not been saturated in chemicals and so forth—and the issues around healthy food and food that is grown in a sustainable and healthy way?

Dr Pearson: Absolutely. If we make the distinction between community gardens whose priority is growing people versus community gardens whose priority is growing food, there is no doubt about it that the experience of growing food, whether it is a young person or an older person, can be very informative and very empowering. I see it as part of the opportunity to re-engage individuals with the source of their food so they get a knowledge of where their food actually comes from. In that sense it can be very powerful. It can be like a gateway experience—"This is what happens"—and then it can lead to other behaviours that are perhaps good for the environment and good for their health.

I think community gardens have a role to play. They are a bit of a flagship in some ways. They are good things to have and they are good to be around. They are actually

really delicate entities to manage. We are lucky in Canberra. We have the Canberra Organic Growers Society who have been very successful in managing community gardens. There are community gardens in Canberra that are not managed by COGS. However, they are not always success stories. You have to have the right physical location within the right region and you need the right infrastructure supporting that community garden.

There has been some research with my colleagues in the UK. About a third of the community gardens in this one region were actually abandoned. Community gardens actually need delicate and sensitive management. Perhaps the more exciting end of the community gardens area is the community gardens in schools program. We have the Stephanie Alexander program, which is the highest profile program. This is just encouraging food and food production to be part of the curriculum for our primary school children. I think it is a fabulous initiative and it is great to see. What is also exciting is that these community gardens actually incorporate the community outside of the school. We have a whole lot of volunteers coming on board and being part of the school experience. Part of that opportunity is created through the gardens. It is an exciting development.

MS PORTER: You said you had recently come from the UK. Do they still have that system of allotments in the UK? Is that different from community gardens?

Dr Pearson: The UK still has the system of allotments and it is very popular. When I use the term "community gardens" I am not referring to allotments. An allotment is different in its structure. In the UK it actually fits under a separate act of parliament. Allotments tend to focus more on food production and less on community building. Their popularity is really being helped by a lot of the celebrity chefs that are encouraging more grow-your-own types of behaviours, as with community gardens and gardening in general.

MS PORTER: Do you see a role for allotments in a place like Canberra?

Dr Pearson: Absolutely. I actually think that allotments are, in a way, a more accessible form of gardening. If the focus is on food production, I think an allotment is probably a more efficient use of the land. In the UK the allotments are very well structured and they have got a model that works. There are very few abandoned allotments in the UK. That is a good sign. I think adapting the UK allotment model to Australia would be a very exciting initiative.

MS PORTER: They have been around for a long time, haven't they?

Dr Pearson: Yes, over 100 years.

THE CHAIR: There has been talk in the ACT, and recently there was a meeting held of interested people in the community around the idea of a community farm. I am not sure whether you have heard about this.

Dr Pearson: I am part of that, so yes.

THE CHAIR: Would you like to talk a little bit about that? How does that fit in? Is it

between community gardens and allotments? Where do you see it fitting in?

Dr Pearson: It is actually on my list of things, I must say. The idea of a city farm I think is really exciting and a great opportunity for Canberra. I would really encourage the government and all interested stakeholders to get behind it. The planning process is well underway. We have had a number of meetings. The purpose of those meetings in part is to garner ideas and then to try and make decisions regarding trade-offs associated with how that city farm would look, how it would be organised and where it would be located.

My personal view is that the value of the city farm is in being an educational facility. It is not about producing food for consumption; it is about education. As such, I would love to see it as a tourist destination. I would love to see it located in a very central spot, ideally next to an existing tourist location. That will ensure that it is financially viable and that financial viability will be generated through the people who pay to come and see it. If you think about it as a tourist destination, it is about entertainment. That gives you an orientation for how you organise and resource that activity. I think in its educational role a city farm is really exciting.

THE CHAIR: Are there other models that you are basing your ideas on that we could look at?

Dr Pearson: Absolutely. The other members of the organising group are more on top of those than I am. Northey Street in Brisbane and CERES in Melbourne are two examples of those physical environments that have a big educational component associated with food. I am more than happy to give further suggestions and more advice in that area if appropriate.

MS PORTER: That would be really good; thank you.

THE CHAIR: As you are new to Canberra, it would not have escaped your attention that we have a lot of trees.

Dr Pearson: It is great.

THE CHAIR: We do love our trees.

MS PORTER: We are a bit tree-centric.

THE CHAIR: All nature strips obviously have their fair share of trees throughout the city. There is a bit of an idea about shifting some of that planting to, say, fruit trees. Do you have any thoughts on whether that would be a good idea?

Dr Pearson: I do. It is a fabulous idea; let's go for it. I think it is just an opportunity. Again, it is part of a gateway-type experience, but why not? There are a number of fruit and nut trees that grow really well here and have minimal problems with pests and diseases and I think they would be really good fun to have as part of our landscape. I know we talk about Canberra being a garden city. My sense is that the emphasis has tended to be on the prettiness of the garden—and that is good—but why not have food as well as the aesthetic beauty of the garden? Let us perhaps expand the

definition of what we deliver to people who live in Canberra and those who visit Canberra in terms of the garden city.

THE CHAIR: When we talk about our footprint there are some who would say that we cannot continue to sprawl, that we do need a balance, for instance, in the type of dwellings that we have throughout our city because people want to live in different types of dwellings. But we do need to look at greater densification in certain areas. And there are people who want to live in apartments, just as there are people who want to live in a stand-alone house. What do you see as the connection here with having community gardens, farms, allotments, fruit trees on roads—that connection to those who would be ending up in higher density and without a little plot of backyard?

Dr Pearson: I see it as a journey for people. When we are talking about food and the possibility of them getting more engaged in the supply of their own food, that can range from some herbs on the windowsill through to perhaps an allotment or a plot in a community garden or an allotment scheme, or significant areas—perhaps 40, 60, 80 or even 100 square metres of active gardening space that might be owned by themselves in their own garden or it might be in a more public-type environment. So I think that journey is important, to offer people those opportunities.

In addition, it is important to recognise that it is not just all in one direction. As you said, at different stages in one's lifestyle, one has opportunities and different constraints. So being very flexible about it is important. The key thing is the accessibility of it. As soon as we have a situation where people start getting in a car, we are losing a lot of the environmental and social benefits of these gardening opportunities. So it is that sort of 400-metre type rule—if you can walk to it, great, but if you cannot walk to it, it is probably not going to be as effective. I guess the important thing is to provide these opportunities in a very dispersed manner. The city farm, of course, has to be in one location, so incorporating accessibility through public transport is an important part of that. It cannot be dispersed—or I should say that my view is that it should not be dispersed. I think the activities of a city farm should be fully concentrated on one site.

MS PORTER: There are other opportunities. I was thinking about retirement villages, for instance.

Dr Pearson: Absolutely. That is a perfect example.

MS PORTER: You could create a place where they could have gardens that everyone could use.

Dr Pearson: Yes. We have the most fantastic open spaces in Canberra, whether it is down by the lakes or up along our ridge tops. There are loads of opportunities for growing more stuff.

MS PORTER: With the ridge tops, you have to ask the NCA if we can.

Dr Pearson: They are a bit fussy; I know that.

MS PORTER: Yes, they are a bit fussy.

THE CHAIR: Just to finish, Dr Pearson, do you have any thoughts about a system for getting rid of food waste? We touched on it earlier. You have spoken about living in the UK. Do you have experience of ways that people are getting rid of their kitchen waste, their organic waste? I am not talking so much about the cuttings from their shrubs out in the yard, but I am wanting to see if you have come across a system and could suggest something.

Dr Pearson: Absolutely. The beginning step is to try and minimise the waste, so that is an important component, while recognising that waste is inevitable. There is going to be some waste. I spent a lot of time with a charity in the UK called Garden Organic. One of the initiatives they had was this idea of giving people, households, a kitchen caddy, a little container in which they could put all the organic waste items, and then having a compost bin outside. So if they had their own garden it could be in their own garden, or if they were living in a block of flats they could have a communal area. That idea of very localised composting seems to me to be the simplest way of doing it. Again, it is about finding that point of opportunity, giving them the resources and infrastructure they need and the little bit of knowledge and letting them go for it.

THE CHAIR: Certainly we were wanting to see a trial in some of the higher density places because many people across Canberra do have their own compost bins in their backyards. I think we could look at some incentives around that. But in the higher density areas to be able to provide that communally I think is a good way to go. When we had some representatives from the farmers market here, they were talking about the possibility of them being a collection point as well.

Dr Pearson: Absolutely, so on a larger scale there are opportunities.

THE CHAIR: Is that something that has been thought of in the concept of a community farm?

Dr Pearson: Yes.

THE CHAIR: What about that idea of being a collection point and then being able to process it in order to use it?

Dr Pearson: Yes. As part of the community farm the idea is to have gardens and those gardens will be demonstration gardens where they demonstrate what you can do with a small area, what you can do with a large area, in terms of both trees, fruit and nut trees, and plants and vegetable products. There are some aesthetics incorporated there as well. Part of that story is composting, so composting your prunings, as you mentioned, but also composting your organic waste from the kitchen: "Here's five different compost bins and this is how it works." So it is very much a demonstration of how you can do it.

THE CHAIR: Are there any other points you would like to make before we finish, Dr Pearson?

Dr Pearson: I have a few quick points I would like to make. Firstly, emphasising tourism, we talked about tourism in relation to the city farm but there is nothing

wrong with part of the regional tourism story being around food. We have a little bit of that emerging in Canberra, mainly around wine, but I think there is a lot of opportunity for more tourism around food. Tourism is a growing market and there are great opportunities there. Related to that, I wonder what the Queen has been eating. When you have a very important dignitary, what do you give them? Surely that is part of the Australian cuisine. Why can't that be the Canberra cuisine? Why can't we develop a cuisine for Canberra? That is just a thought.

In terms of research and research opportunities, I think there is a great opportunity to gather information and actually answer the question: who feeds Canberra? So it is about undertaking some research and knowing where our food is coming from. What are the supply chains that are coming in? What are the retail outlets? What is the diet of Canberrans? By gathering that information and getting that very comprehensive picture of who feeds Canberra, we would then have a great base upon which to understand the system and identify opportunities for policy interventions.

THE CHAIR: Certainly, and we did have some witnesses who were engaged in a food flow type of research project.

Dr Pearson: Yes, my colleagues from ANU.

THE CHAIR: Yes. Thank you very much, Dr Pearson. You will receive a copy of the transcript. If there is anything that you feel was mistakenly transcribed, please let the secretary know. Again, I would like to thank you very much. That was very informative. Thank you for coming in this morning and giving evidence to this inquiry. This hearing is now adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 11.04 am.