

## **Media Release**

### **Drop the Salt!**

#### **AWASH calls for Salt Reduction to be Election Health Promise**

19 September 2007

The Australian Division of World Action on Salt and Health (AWASH) welcomes the Private Member's Motion introduced in the House of Representatives by Margaret May, MP Federal Member for McPherson, on Monday. The Motion, supported by Minister for Ageing, the Hon Chris Pyne MP, calls on government to educate consumers about the danger of high salt diets in recognition of the serious adverse effects of salt on health.

Chair of AWASH, Dr Bruce Neal, said the Motion was a big step in the right direction. He went on to say that salt reduction should be part of all parties' health agendas in the lead up to the election highlighting that government action would save significant money on health budgets.

"The benefits to Australians would be enormous and could be achieved at very low cost," he said. In a recent report prepared for the World Health Organization, Dr Neal showed that the health benefits from a national salt reduction program would be achieved at less than one tenth of the cost of many treatments already widely used in Australia.

"Excess salt consumption is a major risk factor for health," he confirmed. "Not nearly enough is being done to reduce salt in people's diets and Australians are consuming far too much. A reduction to the recommended 6 grams a day would prevent about one fifth of all strokes and heart attacks in Australia each year."

The Motion also calls on government to follow the United Kingdom's example by introducing a colour coded front-of-pack labelling system. Such a system would allow consumers to identify, at a glance, the best foods with the lowest salt content.

"The majority of the salt in the diet is hidden in processed foods and is usually eaten without people knowing it, said Dr Bruce Neal. "The government should also take a leadership role in getting the food industry to reduce the amount of salt added to processed foods. The UK experience confirms that this is the best approach."

Margaret May highlighted the AWASH Drop the Salt! campaign's five year plan calling on food manufacturers and caterers to cut the salt content of foods by a quarter. "Whilst some of those manufacturers have certainly taken up the challenge, we are yet to reach the 25% target," she said. "The good news is that blood pressure can be significantly lowered by reducing salt intake. The health benefits to the Australian people would be enormous and the benefits to the health budget would also be enormous, saving billions of dollars."

AWASH is currently working with stakeholders including key players in the food industry on a strategy to reduce salt in processed foods. AWASH is also planning a series of initiatives for Salt Awareness Week which will take place from 28 January – 2 February 2008.

## **ENDS**

For more information or if you would like to interview Dr Bruce Neal, please contact:

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### **Notes to Editors:**

1. This press release has been issued by The Australian Division of World Action on Salt and Health (AWASH) Secretariat, which coordinates the day-to-day

activities of AWASH and takes final responsibility for all outputs from AWASH. The Secretariat is informed by an Advisory Group which comprises a larger group of individuals with expertise in a range of different areas pertinent to the activities of AWASH.

2. AWASH is a growing network of individuals and organisations concerned with salt and its effects on health. The mission of AWASH is to improve the health of Australians by achieving a gradual population-wide reduction in dietary salt consumption that will reduce cardiovascular diseases and other salt-related health problems. Visit [www.awash.org.au](http://www.awash.org.au) for more information and for a full list of our advisors and supporters.
3. AWASH will be working to Drop the Salt! (name of their national campaign) by promoting the benefits of salt reduction and engaging the participation of all sectors of the Australian community - this will include industry, schools, consumers, scientists, healthcare workers, governments, regulatory bodies and professional organisations. Regular monitoring of progress towards the goal and careful scrutiny of the development of each strategy will be undertaken throughout the campaign.
4. WASH - In 2006, around 194 medical experts from 48 countries around the world joined together to launch WASH – World Action on Salt and Health – in a concerted effort to reduce dietary salt intake, in order to lower blood pressure globally. AWASH is building on the success of the UK campaign. Visit [www.worldactiononsalt.com](http://www.worldactiononsalt.com)