

**RORY ROBERTSON, (PROPOSED) OPENING STATEMENT ON THE AUSTRALIAN PARADOX PAPERS**  
**Discussion on "The place of sugar in Australia's Dietary Intake Guidelines"**  
**Parliament House, Canberra - 29 October 2012**

Good morning. (Mention particular VIPs, nutritionists, journalists...) My name is Rory Robertson. It's a great pleasure to be here in Parliament House in Canberra for today's discussion about "The place of sugar in Australia's Dietary Intake Guidelines". I have a PowerPoint presentation and a website that provide detailed support for all claims I make in this Opening Statement and in today's discussion (PDF attached - and soon to be uploaded at #22 at [www.australianparadox.com](http://www.australianparadox.com) ).

**In terms of improving public health, I have no doubt that a significant toughening of the official stance against sugar is the most helpful thing the Australian Government could do in the field of dietary advice (Slide 3).**

The clear need for a tougher stance against added and concentrated sugar is where the evidence leads - and that, by the way, also is the Australian Government's current position in the draft guidelines - even if the University of Sydney and others with strong links to the sugar and sugary-food industries (Slides 11 and 12) have been busy misrepresenting the basic facts of this matter.

For the benefit of Parliamentarians and others interested in what has been going on, I have summarised the current state of play at #21 at [www.australianparadox.com](http://www.australianparadox.com) or <http://www.australianparadox.com/pdf/university-sydney-falsely-declares-victory.pdf> .

**In the flier for today's event, I was billed as "Economist and chief critic of The Australian Paradox" (Slide 2). Today I will explain why I think that the University of Sydney's now-discredited papers - Australian Paradox (2011) and Australian Paradox Revisited (2012) - are the result of either persistent negligence or deliberate scientific fraud.**

I do not mind much what publicly funded scientists state as an opinion, or what they publish in university Research Discussion Papers or in factually sloppy popular books - including false claims like "There is absolute consensus that sugar in food does not cause diabetes" - but I **object strongly** to the inadvertent or deliberate poisoning of our formal scientific record with false "facts" (Slide 36).

This should be uncontroversial but I've had strong "push back" on that view in my discussions with professional nutritionists. Indeed, it's almost as if there's a **cosy ill-disciplined culture in Australian "nutrition science"** of not correcting errors in published papers and of not publicly criticising fellow professional nutritionists' factually incorrect analyses (Slide 27).

For those new to this issue, the "Australian Paradox" refers to the University of Sydney's claimed scientific observation of "**...a consistent and substantial decline in total refined or added sugar consumption by Australians over the past 30 years**" (1980 to 2010), and thus "**an inverse relationship**" between sugar consumption and obesity. That is, eat more sugar, get thinner. Clearly, "sugar is not a problem" (Slide 8). Yeah, right.

**The Australian Paradox paper is important because it has been used as a spearhead for the University of Sydney's and the food industry's campaigns for the once-a-decade update of official dietary advice to "stay soft" on sugar:** <http://www.smh.com.au/national/health/research-causes-stir-over-sugars-role-in-obesity-20120330-1w3e5.html> .

The (bogus) scientific observation in the prestigious University of Sydney's formally published science papers provides a **critical (false) intellectual justification for putting Heart Foundation ticks and LowGI stamps on sugary junkfoods and claiming them to be "healthy"** (Slide 10 and 37)

Indeed, the claimed fact of "an inverse relationship" between sugar consumption and obesity has been used to **falsely exonerate added sugar as a key driver of global obesity and diabetes**. It's somewhat of a hoax, in my opinion, given the increasingly clear scientific evidence that **added sugar in modern doses is a serious health hazard**:  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/17/magazine/mag-17Sugar-t.html?pagewanted=all>

A big-picture observation is that a clear shift to unnaturally high levels of sugar consumption occurred world-wide as populations shifted from being poor to being more affluent, and that shift broadly corresponded with those populations' shifts from being **naturally lean to being more obese and diabetic** (see chart at <http://www.australianparadox.com/part-2> and Chapter 6 of Gary Taubes's "Good Calories, Bad Calories"; Slide 42).

Notably, the University of Sydney's high-profile nutrition scientists also happen to be **Australia's highest-profile academic defenders of added sugar as harmless**. Indeed, I was drawn to this topic in July last year by a striking report in *The Australian* newspaper in which the University of Sydney's high-profile nutritionists attacked the Australian Government's proposed toughening of official advice against sugar, arguing that sugar is harmless and that, in any case, Australians are eating "less and less" of it (Slide 11).

It's a pity that the authors of *Australian Paradox* and its pro-sugar supporters chose to make themselves unavailable for today's event despite something like six weeks of advance notice. The apparent "collusion" of these various pro-sugar groups to "boycott" this event - not my observation but that of one of the organisers - is as disturbing as it is unsurprising, in that their refusal to be here today is consistent with the disrespect for the public debate demonstrated by the University of Sydney's ongoing refusal to correct the bogus claim of "an inverse relationship" between sugar consumption and obesity: <http://www.australianparadox.com/pdf/8-QUESTIONS-FOR-AWB-&-JBM-BANNED.pdf>

Still, the contempt shown in choosing to ignore a range of Parliamentarians' legitimate interest in this important topic before the draft nutrition guidelines are finalised in coming months is striking, especially given the strong views expressed in that piece in *The Australian* (Slide 11) and the combined ongoing efforts of the University of Sydney and the sugar industry to misrepresent key facts via the *Australian Paradox* dispute.

In particular, I'm referring to the University of Sydney's enthusiastic yet unwise embrace of the sugar industry's new nonsense-based Green Pool "update" of a sugar series that was discontinued as unreliable by the ABS over a decade ago (4306.0), but now - ridiculously - dug up from behind the shed and "updated" by applying the same overwhelmed and broken methodology that the ABS abandoned as unreliable over a decade ago (<http://www.australianparadox.com/pdf/university-sydney-falsely-declares-victory.pdf>).

### Correction or retraction of bogus *Australian Paradox* conclusion

So, I have come to Parliament House in Canberra today to explain why I have felt it important to argue near and far for the correction or retraction of the University of Sydney's "shonky sugar study". I believe the paper has become an academic disgrace and a menace to public health.

The University of Sydney's now-discredited paper should be corrected or retracted because its obviously false conclusion – “an inverse relationship” between added-sugar consumption and obesity - has become a **menace to Australian public health**. Disturbingly, the Heart Foundation, the Australian Diabetes Council, Nutrition Australia and the Dietitians Association of Australia all have drawn false comfort from that mistaken claim and subsequently misinformed countless Australians seeking reliable nutrition advice (examples on request).

Importantly, my dispute with the University of Sydney at its core is not about science, it's not about nutrition, it's about simple things like up versus down, valid versus invalid datasets and the need to correct serious errors in the public debate (Slides 13-23).

The **key problem** is that the paper's main conclusion is **factually incorrect**, and the public record still has not been corrected more than 18 months down the track. The available data in **the authors' own published charts do not support** the conclusion that sugar consumption has fallen over the past 30 years, let alone shown a substantial decline. There is **no** "inverse relationship" between Australian sugar consumption and obesity.

**That is, there is no Australian Paradox, just a series of serious errors and a bogus high-profile conclusion published not once but twice as scientific fact in the little-respected pay-as-you-publish E-journal *Nutrients*.**

Again, the *Australian Paradox* papers are wrong on the authors' own published charts. The authors show **five separate big-picture indicators of sugar consumption**, none of them perfect but each providing clues on the underlying facts.

Of those five sugar indicators, **four out of five trend up not down** in the relevant 1980 to 2010 timeframe (Slides 13-20). As well, **Slide 20 on sugary soft-drink consumption features a rather eye-popping error**, so let's have no more pretending that there are no serious problems with the paper.

Awkwardly, **the only indicator that trended down** - the only one that at first glance would support the bogus *Australian Paradox* conclusion - **was discontinued as unreliable** by Australian Bureau of Statistics after 1998-99, over a decade ago!

**Thus the whole *Australian Paradox* fiasco is built on a dataset (4306.0) that was discontinued as unreliable** by the ABS a decade before the "shonky sugar study" was published in the pay-as-you-publish E-journal *Nutrients* (Slides 21 and 22). **Either deliberately or inadvertently, the authors chose not to inform - hid from - readers and reviewers** the fact that the key dataset was discontinued as unreliable a decade before the faulty paper was published. **How/why** did that critical fact go unmentioned in two published papers?

But don't take my word for it on 4306.0: **the ABS itself provides an information line** on the cover page of its discontinued "Apparent Consumption of Foodstuffs" dataset - "For further information about these and related statistics, contact Karen Connaughton on

Canberra 02 6252 5337" - for the media and other analysts keen to understand the data issues that led the ABS to conclude that its sugar-counting methodology had - over six decades - become increasingly outdated, overwhelmed and unreliable (Slides 38-40).

The **particularly difficult counting issues** involved in measuring the amount of refined sugar scattered throughout our food supply generally have been ignored by the University of Sydney authors and their supporters. **In short, the ABS's measurement problems intensified between 1938-39 to 1998-99 as refined sugar went from being bought in bags at the grocery store to being bought already added to tens of thousands of varieties of manufactured food and drink products** (Slide 39).

Both the authors of *Australian Paradox* and their supporters seem **unaware of the particular problems in measuring added sugar**. That is, various agencies in Canberra **still publish** apparent consumption data for **easier-to-measure food and drink products, including beef, lamb, pork, chicken, butter, milk, cheese, beer and wine**, but not for much-harder-to-measure refined sugar: <http://www.australianparadox.com/pdf/New-nonsense-based-sugarreport.pdf>

Observers of this dispute may be interested to know that **Australia's most-trusted nutritionist, Dr Rosemary Stanton**, has agreed with me that "we have no evidence that sugar consumption in Australia has fallen". Moreover, Dr Stanton has "many objections to that particular paper" and "will almost certainly cite it at some stage as an example of something [she] consider[s] to be incorrect" (Slide 18). Indeed, there is a growing list of people who think the *Australian Paradox* papers are an **academic disgrace, or at least hopelessly wrong** (Slide 26).

### Free advice

Here is a bit of free advice for the University of Sydney. The **main scope** for the authors of *Australian Paradox* to be hopelessly wrong - as they are - and somehow **not** know that they are hopelessly wrong - is if they have remained completely clueless about the important difficulties in measuring the consumption of added sugar.

**Now that they know (from reading this), however, it may make sense to retract the paper and explain that it was all a big mixup involving confusion around the relationship between the original ABS dataset that was discontinued as unreliable after 1998-99 and the FAO dataset that involves data simply made up to fill would-be holes in its spreadsheets. I assume we now all can see the strangely flat green line in Slides 21 and 22.**

I would caution the University of Sydney that any such concession should come sooner rather than later because the *Australian Paradox* scandal is getting bigger not smaller. As a friend of the University of Sydney - I hope my sons get the opportunity to study there down the track - I urge its management and Senate (<http://sydney.edu.au/senate/Fellows.shtml>) to fix this problem before it "blows up" in the media.

The obvious errors in the now-discredited paper make the University **an easy target** at a time when governments are looking to cut public funding of research functions that do not provide "value for money" or indeed are "worse than useless" because they mislead rather than inform the public debate.

Of course, the authors and/or the University will need to ensure that any concession about the "mix up" with the ABS and FAO datasets is more convincing and more scholarly than **the un scholarly retraction of the authors' earlier slippery false made-up claim that motor vehicles were eating a big chunk of the available sugar via ethanol production in the original defence of their faulty paper** (Slides 30 and 31).

**That "ethanol mixup" provided unmistakable confirmation** that the University of Sydney scientists really did not know what they were talking about when discussing the nature of sugar consumption - by either humans or cars! - when they started defending their now-discredited paper (<http://www.smh.com.au/business/pesky-economist-wont-let-big-sugar-lie-20120725-22pru.html>).

Amusingly, as noted earlier, the Australian sugar industry recently lobbed a **bogus "update" of the dead but still-unreliable ABS 4306.0 sugar series** into the public debate, an "update" produced by consultants Green Pool Commodity Specialists. The nonsense-based "update" involved digging up the dead ABS dataset before - ridiculously - updating it by applying the same overwhelmed and broken methodology that the ABS had abandoned as unreliable over a decade ago (**Slides 38-40**).

**The project was a fool's errand from the start and the results are a complete nonsense, but it's nice work if you can get paid for it:** <http://www.australianparadox.com/pdf/New-nonsense-based-sugarreport.pdf>

**It's funny - because it's so ridiculous - but this latest development in the *Australian Paradox* scandal highlights the incompetence or worse that seems to be running amok in key parts of the University of Sydney's "nutrition science" area. Earlier this month, the**

**University of Sydney embraced the sugar industry's nonsense-based Green Pool report and declared victory in the *Australian Paradox* dispute** (Slides 25-26).

Mr Bill Shrapnel - the Deputy Chairman of the University of Sydney's Nutrition Research Foundation - belatedly highlighted a large hole in the now-discredited paper, yet immediately contradicted himself by claiming – with a straight face and maybe seriously but still erroneously – that “**the publication of a new report has vindicated the [AustralianParadox] researchers**”. Ironically, that Foundation exists in part “to reliably inform the public about nutrition” (<http://www.australianparadox.com/pdf/university-sydney-falsely-declares-victory.pdf> ).

The fact that the *Australian Paradox* conclusion is factually incorrect and yet supposedly was "peer reviewed" before being published twice **raises the question of whether this episode reflects merely persistent negligence or deliberate scientific fraud.**

Those seem the only two possibilities: persistent negligence or deliberate fraud. I do not have a strong view either way, but **I consider the origins of University of Sydney's repeated misrepresentation and distortion of scientific facts in formal journal articles to be a matter worthy of public investigation (Slide 23).**

**Given the repeated misrepresentation of key facts in *Australian Paradox* and *Australian Paradox Revisited* - including there being no mention in either paper of the critical fact that the all-important ABS sugar series had been discontinued as unreliable after 1998-99 - not everyone will accept that all errors along the way have been inadvertent** (Slides 20-23 and 33).

Nevertheless, as noted above, if the scientists at some point feel an inclination to "explain" how they managed to publish the same false conclusions twice - **without ever mentioning** to readers or any independent reviewers about the extraordinary and invalid use of the discontinued ABS sugar series on which their (bogus) conclusions are based - the best available approach may be **a concession involving an "inadvertent FAO/ABS mixup"**.

**There are at least two further unsettling aspects of this dispute worth highlighting.**

**First**, some observers will be surprised to learn that **the lead author of the *Australian Paradox* paper and the "Guest Editor" of the publishing journal are the very same person!** Yes, that's awkward (Slide 4). That's hardly an approach designed to promote real confidence in the quality-control process, if indeed there was one.

**In the history of the Universe has there ever been a Guest Editor who has explained to a lead author that "I'm sorry but I cannot publish *my* paper because it is dominated by a series of serious errors that has resulted in a bogus false conclusion"?**

Disturbingly, the University of Sydney's management now is pretending that quality control for the *Australian Paradox* papers involved “**internationally accepted standard practice**”, when it must know that the lead author and the Guest Editor are the same person. **So that practice in this case is "standard" really only to the same extent that Dr Evil's childhood - as described in the film *Austin Powers* - was "pretty standard really"!**

The University of Sydney's **disingenuous "It's peer-reviewed and published, so get lost" defence** of its bogus *Australian Paradox* papers is unwise. It is true that peer-reviewed published papers **should** be free of serious errors, but once it has been demonstrated that a paper is dominated by serious errors, as in this case, the fact that it supposedly was peer reviewed is **Exhibit A** in any public investigation (<http://www.australianparadox.com/pdf/Sept2012-Conversations.pdf> ).

Clearly, given its reliance on a dataset long ago discontinued as unreliable to drive its false conclusion – with four other indicators of sugar consumption trending up not down! - **the peer-review process for *Australian Paradox* was either non-existent, incompetent or ignored.** Why does the University of Sydney now think that the rest of us should have confidence in a failed quality-control process that a sceptical nutritionist would say seems to boil down to the paper being self-assessed as excellent by its lead author?

**Second, the dispute involves a serious undisclosed conflict of interest.** That is, the University of Sydney's high-profile defenders of added sugar in food as harmless also operate an enterprise with revenues dependent on the general public continuing to view added sugar in food as harmless. In particular, the University of Sydney operates a "Glycemic Index" enterprise that is based on the simple notion that low-GI foods - GI 55 and lower - are "healthy" while higher GI foods are unhealthy. Yet **fructose - the “sweet poison” half of added sugar – has a super-low GI of 19** and there's growing evidence that unnaturally elevated rates of fructose consumption are a key driver of global obesity and diabetes: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/17/magazine/mag-17Sugar-t.html?pagewanted=all>

As discussed, the University of Sydney in this episode has made a series of serious factual errors (Slide 36) that happen to be supportive of its claim that sugar consumption is harmless, while at the same time running a business that promotes - among other

things - "low GI" sugary foods as "healthy" (Slides 11 and 12). Awkwardly, the University has a serious but undisclosed conflict of interest (Slide 37).

As most of the rest of us know well, such serious conflicts of interest are supposed to be fully disclosed so that outsiders can have some ability to assess where the interests of science end and the interests of the scientists' business begin (<http://www.australianparadox.com/pdf/Sydney-Uni-conflict-interest-030712.pdf>).

Thanks for your attention this morning. That's most of what I wanted to say. In today's discussion, I encourage participants to insist that I justify any statement they consider to be factually incorrect or an unreasonable assessments of the facts.

I have no doubt that my critique of *Australian Paradox* is correct, however, and I have been encouraged in this belief by the fact that no-one from the University of Sydney - nor amongst the thousands of independent observers who have visited my website - [www.australianparadox.com](http://www.australianparadox.com) - has come even close to **unlocking the \$40,000 cash or the public apologies on offer in the Australian Paradox Challenge** issued in a letter to University of Sydney Vice Chancellor Dr Michael Spence on 7 June: Slide 6 and <http://www.australianparadox.com/pdf/SydneyUniVC%20LETTER070612.pdf>

**In summary, all I have ever asked in this *Australian Paradox* dispute is for the University of Sydney to correct or retract its bogus claim of "an inverse relationship" between the consumption of added sugar and obesity. Now I'm also asking: what are we to make of the University's inadvertent or deliberate – yet rather persistent - efforts to misrepresent key facts on sugar consumption?**

While the bogus "inverse relationship" conclusion supposedly was "peer reviewed" before twice being published formally, I have demonstrated that it is spectacularly wrong, based as it is on a single data series that was **discontinued as unreliable** over a decade before the now-discredited paper was published, and given that the conclusion of a substantial decline in sugar consumption is **contradicted by not one but four** of the authors' own published charts. On top of the clear misrepresentation of Figure 5A – in which sugary softdrink sales trend up not down - **why did the fact that the key dataset was discontinued as unreliable go unmentioned?**

In any case, just as there was no basis for the authors' slippery **made-up false claim that cars not humans have been eating a big chunk of the available sugar** via ethanol production (Slides 30-31), there is no valid basis for the bogus conclusion that suggests "Eat more sugar, and get thinner"! The University of Sydney should correct its misinformation on obesity and then hang its head in shame.

**Importantly, those charged with the duty of finalising the national nutrition guidelines in coming months should ignore anything and everything produced by the University of Sydney's highest-profile nutritionists. Indeed, the University of Sydney's senior management and Senate should consider whether the quality of analysis and scholarship demonstrated by the authors of *Australian Paradox* is consistent with the standards to which the University aspires.**

In my opinion, the University's senior nutritionists have brought the University into disrepute. Regardless of the University's judgements on this matter, I think the authors should be removed from any and all publicly funded positions and from anything to do with public health, including the "Head of Research" at the Australian Diabetes Council. That is a very tough" stance, but one I think that is well supported by the well-documented facts in this growing *Australian Paradox* scandal.

I look forward to today's discussion, and please be very critical of me if you consider what I have said or written anywhere is factually incorrect or unreasonable. After all, my main argument here is based on the view that facts in science and in the public debate need to be sacrosanct.

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**roby robertson**

**economist and former-fattie**

**now fairly fructose free!** 😊

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