

# The great sugar debate

Remember economist Rory Robertson who bet Doomsday forecaster Steve Keen a walk to Mt Kosciuszko over house prices not crashing during the GFC?

Well he's at it again and this time he's taking on University of Sydney nutritionists Jennie Brand-Miller and Alan Barclay over their study findings suggesting there is "an inverse relationship" between sugar consumption and obesity.

*The Australian Paradox* study by Professor Brand-Miller, author of *The Low GI Diet* book, and Dr Barclay, the Australian Diabetes Council's head of research, claimed that Australia's sugar consumption had fallen by 23 per cent over the past three decades while obesity has soared.

While this may come as a happy surprise to some, Robertson is not so joyous. He says the "shonky sugar study", is a combination of unreliable facts and misinterpretation of statistics and data which have led the nutritionists to publishing, what he says is a "flawed" paper.

The nutritionists have been locked in a heated debate with the economist. But in a bid to end the fight, Robertson said he would give \$40,000 to anyone who is able to dispute his claims. On his

website, he has described *The Australian Paradox*, published in the e-journal *Nutrients*, as "sloppy data analysis". Apart from misinterpreting that statistics, Robertson accuses the pair of using UN Food and Agriculture Organisation statistics taken from information from an Australian Bureau of Statistics survey that had been discontinued several years ago.

Robertson is arguing for "the papers correction or retraction by its author, the journal and or the University of Sydney". However, his requests don't seem to be so straightforward, as Brand-Miller and Barclay blame Robertson for factual errors and "misinterpretation of the distinctions between total sugars versus refined sugars, sugar availability versus apparent consumption, sugar-sweetened and diet soft drinks, and other nutrition information."

They say he incorrectly equates sugar availability with sugar consumption. In the *Australian Paradox Revisited* paper the pair say sugar availability is not the same as consumption as it doesn't take into account food wastage, use in animal food, beer and alcohol fermentation and in non-food industrial use. The academics substantiate their original paper saying it is supported by three independent sources. There is no word yet on anyone winning the money. ■



## A look at the shark social whirl

THE networking behaviour of sharks is being examined to discover the mysteries of their society. Lead researcher Nathan Bass is conducting the study as part of his honours project, in conjunction with Taronga Zoo to determine why and when the large marine predators congregate.

"In this day and age where the mere mention of the word 'shark' evokes a whole range of preconceived ideas, it's humbling to acknowledge that much of the underwater world is still a mystery."

Despite various anecdotal reports, little scientific research has been conducted on shark social behaviour.

This project is focused on Port Jackson sharks and involves researchers, using scuba equipment, to identify which sharks are interacting. Divers will also record and track the animals' interactions and movements with acoustic devices, which will be set up to acoustic listening stations in the Jervis Bay Marine Park.

Bass said that Port Jackson sharks are social while resting, frequently with more than 30 individual sharks recorded together in one area.

Taronga Zoo researcher Dr Jo Wyszniowski said that most people think

that sharks are a solitary species. "Many shark species have shown us that their social networks are much more complex."

Bass said they hope to find out whether Port Jackson sharks frequently congregate with the same individuals for social reasons, and if they are, whether they prefer to socialise with individuals of the same sex and size or rather with individuals they are related to. ■

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