

**CORRESPONDENCE WITH NUTRIENTS' PUBLISHER, DR SHU-KUN LIN**

On Tue, Apr 10, 2012 at 9:58 PM, Dr. Shu-Kun Lin <[lin@mdpi.com](mailto:lin@mdpi.com)> wrote [in response to my second letter to him and his Editorial Board]:

Dear Mr. Robertson,

I know you will continue to do this by writing to the editorial board again and again. This is crazy.

If you are a scholar, please submit your critique for publication in Nutrients or in another scholarly journal. Otherwise do not bother us.

Please remove my e-mail from your mailing list.

Best regards,  
Shu-Kun

Dr. Shu-Kun Lin  
Publisher of Nutrients  
President of MDPI  
MDPI AG  
Postfach, CH-4005 Basel, Switzerland  
Office Location: Kandererstrasse 25, CH-4057 Basel, Switzerland  
Tel. [+41 61 683 77 34](tel:+41616837734) (office)  
Fax [+41 61 302 8918](tel:+41613028918)  
Mobile: [+41 79 322 3379](tel:+41793223379); Skype: mdpibasel-lin  
E-mail: [lin@mdpi.com](mailto:lin@mdpi.com)  
<http://www.mdpi.com>

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **roby robertson** <[strathburnstation@gmail.com](mailto:strathburnstation@gmail.com)>

Date: Wed, Apr 11, 2012 at 3:26 PM

**Subject: fyi: RR response to publisher of Nutrients re Sydney scientists' shonky sugar study**

To: "Dr. Shu-Kun Lin" <[lin@mdpi.com](mailto:lin@mdpi.com)>

Cc: [dvc.provost@sydney.edu.au](mailto:dvc.provost@sydney.edu.au), [chair.academicboard@sydney.edu.au](mailto:chair.academicboard@sydney.edu.au), [stephen.simpson@sydney.edu.au](mailto:stephen.simpson@sydney.edu.au), [MichaeI.Spence@sydney.edu.au](mailto:MichaeI.Spence@sydney.edu.au), [Stephen.Garton@sydney.edu.au](mailto:Stephen.Garton@sydney.edu.au), [Derrick.Armstrong@sydney.edu.au](mailto:Derrick.Armstrong@sydney.edu.au), [Shane.Houston@sydney.edu.au](mailto:Shane.Houston@sydney.edu.au), [John.Hearn@sydney.edu.au](mailto:John.Hearn@sydney.edu.au), [Jill.Trewhella@sydney.edu.au](mailto:Jill.Trewhella@sydney.edu.au), [Ann.Brewer@sydney.edu.au](mailto:Ann.Brewer@sydney.edu.au), [Gwynny.th.Llewellyn@sydney.edu.au](mailto:Gwynny.th.Llewellyn@sydney.edu.au), [Kathryn.Refshauge@sydney.edu.au](mailto:Kathryn.Refshauge@sydney.edu.au), [Chris.Peck@sydney.edu.au](mailto:Chris.Peck@sydney.edu.au), [Bruce.Robinson@sydney.edu.au](mailto:Bruce.Robinson@sydney.edu.au), [Jill.White@sydney.edu.au](mailto:Jill.White@sydney.edu.au), [Iqbal.Ramzan@sydney.edu.au](mailto:Iqbal.Ramzan@sydney.edu.au), [vice.chancellor@sydney.edu.au](mailto:vice.chancellor@sydney.edu.au), [chris.c.offey@sydney.edu.au](mailto:chris.c.offey@sydney.edu.au), [debbie.bowman@sydney.edu.au](mailto:debbie.bowman@sydney.edu.au), [tim.payne@sydney.edu.au](mailto:tim.payne@sydney.edu.au), [andrew.potter@sydney.edu.au](mailto:andrew.potter@sydney.edu.au), [u.rebecca.murray@sydney.edu.au](mailto:u.rebecca.murray@sydney.edu.au), [jane.harvey@sydney.edu.au](mailto:jane.harvey@sydney.edu.au), [jane.oakeshott@sydney.edu.au](mailto:jane.oakeshott@sydney.edu.au), [meryl.bradford@sydney.edu.au](mailto:meryl.bradford@sydney.edu.au), [vc.admin@sydney.edu.au](mailto:vc.admin@sydney.edu.au), [peter.howe@unisa.edu.au](mailto:peter.howe@unisa.edu.au), [jon.buckley@unisa.edu.au](mailto:jon.buckley@unisa.edu.au), [alicia.li@mdpi.com](mailto:alicia.li@mdpi.com), [pike@mdpi.com](mailto:pike@mdpi.com), [sean.h.adams@ars.usda.gov](mailto:sean.h.adams@ars.usda.gov), [jjb\\_anderson@unc.edu](mailto:jjb_anderson@unc.edu), [enrico.bignetti@unipr.it](mailto:enrico.bignetti@unipr.it), [jeffrey.blumberg@tufts.edu](mailto:jeffrey.blumberg@tufts.edu), [d.cameron-smith@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:d.cameron-smith@auckland.ac.nz), [francesco.capozzi@unibo.it](mailto:francesco.capozzi@unibo.it), [karenc@uow.edu.au](mailto:karenc@uow.edu.au), [fdunshea@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:fdunshea@unimelb.edu.au), [edecker@foodsci.umass.edu](mailto:edecker@foodsci.umass.edu), [wrcraig@andrews.edu](mailto:wrcraig@andrews.edu), [vflood@uow.edu.au](mailto:vflood@uow.edu.au), [faye@cirad.fr](mailto:faye@cirad.fr), [haub@ksu.edu](mailto:haub@ksu.edu), [bengt.jeppsson@med.lu.se](mailto:bengt.jeppsson@med.lu.se), [kmecklin@uoguelph.ca](mailto:kmecklin@uoguelph.ca), [kuhlensc@illinois.edu](mailto:kuhlensc@illinois.edu), [leidyh@missouri.edu](mailto:leidyh@missouri.edu), [mjplemay@gmail.com](mailto:mjplemay@gmail.com), [rbcdonald@ucdavis.edu](mailto:rbcdonald@ucdavis.edu), [bmeyer@uow.edu.au](mailto:bmeyer@uow.edu.au), [goran.molin@appliednutrition.lth.se](mailto:goran.molin@appliednutrition.lth.se), [k.pentieva@ulster.ac.uk](mailto:k.pentieva@ulster.ac.uk), [caryl.nowson@deakin.edu.au](mailto:caryl.nowson@deakin.edu.au), [pribis@andrews.edu](mailto:pribis@andrews.edu), [remig@ksu.edu](mailto:remig@ksu.edu), [s.samman@mmb.usyd.edu.au](mailto:s.samman@mmb.usyd.edu.au), [andrew@scholeylab.com](mailto:andrew@scholeylab.com), [song@msu.edu](mailto:song@msu.edu), [jj.strain@ulster.ac.uk](mailto:jj.strain@ulster.ac.uk), [james.swain@case.edu](mailto:james.swain@case.edu), [tamurat@uab.edu](mailto:tamurat@uab.edu), [teranmd@illinois.edu](mailto:teranmd@illinois.edu), [ustunol@anr.msu.edu](mailto:ustunol@anr.msu.edu), [sv98@columbia.edu](mailto:sv98@columbia.edu), [wendy.ward@utoronto.ca](mailto>wendy.ward@utoronto.ca), [m.westerterp@hb.unimaas.nl](mailto:m.westerterp@hb.unimaas.nl), [susan.whiting@usask.ca](mailto:susan.whiting@usask.ca), [l.williams@rowett.ac.uk](mailto:l.williams@rowett.ac.uk), [zile@msu.edu](mailto:zile@msu.edu), [boyd.swinburn@deakin.edu.au](mailto:boyd.swinburn@deakin.edu.au)

Rory Robertson  
Sydney  
11 April 2012

Dear Dr Lin,

Thank you for your belated response to my formal letter to you and your large team at *Nutrients* journal on 22 March, three weeks ago. I'm surprised that on this important matter - in this age of E-communication - it took so long for anyone from the journal - of which you are the publisher - to respond.

Thank you also for your kind offer to consider publishing my critique of *Australian Paradox* in *Nutrients*. Please go right ahead. You and your Editorial Board have my latest draft. I hope it can withstand the withering scrutiny of *Nutrients'* peer-review process. Let me know if you find any "T"s that need to be crossed.

Actually, your instincts were wrong. I wasn't expecting to write to you or your Editorial Board again. Following yesterday's note, I had expected to be an interested observer from afar, watching to see whether or not *Nutrients* - your scholarly E-journal - takes seriously its responsibility for quality control.

But since *Nutrients* now has acknowledged my communication - if belatedly and unenthusiastically - I wonder if you might please respond to the legitimate issues I raised on 22 March. In particular, **I'm interested in your much-cited scholarly peer-review process.** That is, as I've documented in great detail, the *Australian Paradox* paper was published with a series of major errors so dominating that they invalidate its conclusion and even its title. That's something a genuinely expert and independent peer-review process would pick up, wouldn't you expect?

Are you confident the process actually is robust and working well? Recall that one of the authors of the paper in dispute also was your "Guest Editor" of the "Special Issue" of *Nutrients* in which *Australian Paradox* was published ([http://www.mdpi.com/journal/nutrients/special\\_issues/carbohydrates/](http://www.mdpi.com/journal/nutrients/special_issues/carbohydrates/)). I wonder if you can confirm, please, that particularly robust peer-review arrangements were put in place to deal with that unusual situation? Or maybe just provide details of the independent peer review that did take place? For example, are you able perhaps to provide me, please, with any formal reports from your referees in this case?

You see, Dr Lin, it's a bit of a puzzle for outsiders: there are 40 or so scientists on your Editorial Board yet apparently no-one noticed, at the very least, that a chart showing a 30% rise in per capita sugary soft-drink sales (Figure 5A) is maybe just a tad inconsistent with the key conclusion of a "substantial" decline in refined sugar consumption. Indeed, it's not even a slight stretch to say that the range of evidence - readily available to any expert reviewer - suggests that the post-1980 trend in refined sugar consumption is flat to up, not down, let alone down substantially. **So in reality there is no Australian Paradox, yet there it sits published on the web in an E-journal.**

I hope you are able to shed light on that puzzle, and perhaps reconcile it with early results from an informal peer-review process underway externally. That is, I have encouraged scrutiny of my critique by scientists and others across Australia. It's hard to know what all of them think, but I can reveal that I've had no-one but the authors dispute my conclusion that there is no Australian Paradox. Moreover, I have been supported publicly in this observation by **Professor Boyd Swinburn**, who is the director of the World Health Organisation Collaborating Centre for Obesity Prevention and Related Research and Training at Deakin University.

According to an article recently published in several Australian newspapers, **Professor Swinburn "...has reviewed the arguments from both sides and comes out broadly in favour of Mr Robertson". Indeed, he "...says the study's summary of the data as showing 'a consistent and substantial decline in total refined or added sugar by Australians over the past 30 years' belies the facts 'and is a serious over-call in my opinion". His conclusion is that 'the ecological trends of sugar and obesity are pretty well matched and I do not believe there is any paradox to explain'"** (<http://www.smh.com.au/national/health/research-causes-stir-over-sugars-role-in-obesity-20120330-1w3e5.html> ).

**I wonder, Dr Lin and the Editorial Board of Nutrients, if you are starting to sense my frustration. There's a shonky sugar study published in an E-journal on the web that has become a menace to Australian public health, yet there is no obvious way for outsiders to correct the problem. In the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, the authors unreasonably are maintaining that there is no problem; so too, the E-journal unreasonably is maintaining that there is no problem.**

I'm sorry that this issue is a difficult one for all of us to deal with. It's a complicated situation because it's rather unusual for an academic paper so dominated by errors that its conclusion ("a consistent and substantial decline in total refined or added sugar by Australians over the past 30 years") clearly is invalid to be both (i) published as is in a journal and (ii) surprisingly influential in the public debate. And not in a good way.

By the way, I have to say I loved the authors' story - in the "Fructose was not 'scarce'" section of the rebuttal - that modern doses of fructose - the "sweet poison" half of table sugar - may have been widely available to even "the poor" at "certain times" in history via bee-keeping (also cake?). In Australia, the suggestion is that modern doses of fructose were available via bush honey, fruits and flowers. That's great! Good one! Yep, "fructose was not 'scarce'" in Oz. Actually, I spent a wonderful chunk of my young life wandering almost daily around the Australian bush in the Northern Territory, South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland, chasing birds' nests, rabbits, kangaroos, feral pigs and fish - or anything interesting really - and I can tell you the notion that traditional Australian Aborigines had the opportunity for (say) 50,000 years to suck down an a lazy (say) 25kg of fructose per person per year - decade after decade - is a joke. And yet there is that suggestion sitting neatly published in your journal. Let me guess: also "peer reviewed" by experts!

In Australia, as elsewhere, "Refined sugar may not have displaced more nutrient-rich items from our present-day diets but only the nutritionally comparable food, honey". Yep, that might be how it happened. As a cross-check, perhaps your authors might want to spend a week wandering around Centennial Park in Sydney or further afield, reporting back each evening on the buckets of fructose they managed to secure before dinner time?

Thank you for your time, Dr Lin. You may be aware of growing media interest in this dispute. I am hopeful that you and your team on the Editorial Board are in the process of fixing the serious problems that I have struggled to bring to your attention.

As requested, I have removed you from my email list.

Best wishes,  
Rory

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**rory robertson**

**economist and former-fattie**

**now fairly fructose free!**

[strathburnstation@gmail.com](mailto:strathburnstation@gmail.com)

*Strathburn Cattle Station is a proud partner of YALARI, Australia's leading provider of quality boarding-school educations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teenagers. Check it out at <http://www.strathburn.com/yalari.php>*

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**On Wed, Apr 11, 2012 at 11:09 PM, Dr. Shu-Kun Lin <[lin@mdpi.com](mailto:lin@mdpi.com)> wrote:**

**No time to read your message. If you want to submit something for publication you need to follow the instructions for authors and submit it accordingly.**

**Dr. Shu-Kun Lin**

Publisher of Nutrients

President of MDPI

MDPI AG

Postfach, CH-4005 Basel, Switzerland

Office Location: Kandererstrasse 25, CH-4057 Basel, Switzerland

Tel. [+41 61 683 77 34](tel:+41616837734) <tel:%2B41%2061%20683%2077%2034> (office)

Fax [+41 61 302 8918](tel:+41613028918) <tel:%2B41%2061%20302%208918>

Mobile: [+41 79 322 3379](tel:+41793223379) <tel:%2B41%2079%20322%203379>; Skype:

[mdpibasel-lin](https://www.skype.com/user/mdpibasel-lin)

E-mail: [lin@mdpi.com](mailto:lin@mdpi.com) <mailto:[lin@mdpi.com](mailto:lin@mdpi.com)>

<http://www.mdpi.com>