

11 November 2013

Rory Robertson requests formal investigation by University of Sydney Academic Board into quality and origins of extraordinarily faulty yet "peer reviewed" *Australian Paradox* paper

Dear Members of the Academic Board of the University of Sydney,

Good morning. My name is Rory Robertson. For more than a year and a half, I have been arguing near and far for the correction or retraction of the University of Sydney's extraordinarily faulty *Australian Paradox* paper. Some of you already are well aware that the (non-existent) "Australian Paradox" involves the negligent false claim that there is "an inverse relationship" between sugar consumption and obesity: <http://www.smh.com.au/business/pesky-economist-wont-let-big-sugar-lie-20120725-22pru.html>

Academic Board members, I wish I had known about you sooner. I was thrilled to learn just last week that the University of Sydney's Academic Board is the entity that "has the principal responsibility to encourage and maintain the highest standards in teaching, scholarship and research and to safeguard the academic freedom of the University": <http://sydney.edu.au/ab/about/members.shtml>

Accordingly, I am writing to formally request that your Board undertake an official investigation into the University of Sydney's *Australian Paradox* scandal. The following link highlights the serious errors and misrepresentations by Professor Jennie Brand-Miller and Dr Alan Barclay during their campaign to exonerate added sugar – including via sugary softdrinks - as a key driver of obesity: <http://www.australianparadox.com/pdf/GraphicEvidence.pdf>

Notably, your scientists seeking to exonerate sugar also operate the University of Sydney's Glycemic Index (GI) enterprise that exists in part to charge food companies up to \$6,000 a pop to stamp particular brands of sugar and sugary products as healthy: <http://www.logicane.com/Partners> ; <http://www.gisymbol.com/products-2/>

Academic Board members, not only have your scientists and food-industry service providers recklessly sought to exonerate modern sugar consumption - including via sugary softdrinks - as a key driver of obesity in a self-published yet "peer reviewed" formal paper - self-published in the sense that the lead author also was the "Guest Editor" of the publishing journal - but they also have attempted to exonerate sugar consumption as a key driver of type-2 diabetes, in their big-selling popsci diet books: "There is absolute consensus that sugar in food does not cause [type 2] diabetes": <http://www.australianparadox.com/pdf/diabetes.pdf>

An absolute consensus, yet debate rages all around? In fact, in my opinion, it is clear that modern rates of sugar consumption - including via sugary drinks - are a key driver of global obesity, type 2 diabetes and heart disease: <http://care.diabetesjournals.org/content/33/11/2477.full.pdf> ; <http://www.rethinksugarydrink.org.au/facts> ; http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/17/magazine/mag-17Sugar-t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0 ; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xDaYa0AB8TQ&feature=youtu.be> ; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HMKbhbW-Y3c&feature=c4-overview-vl&list=PL0B44DF914C4FB3ED>

Indeed, in February of this year, the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) toughened Canberra's dietary advice against added sugar, despite the University of Sydney's high-profile campaign against that tougher advice. Outrageously, the sugary food and beverage industries – and its friends in academia - used the University of Sydney stamp of credibility and its "shonky sugar study" as intellectual spearheads in their aggressive attempt to kill that tougher stance: <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/health-science/a-spoonful-of-sugar-is-not-so-bad/story-e6frq8y6-1226090126776> ; <http://www.smh.com.au/national/health/research-causes-stir-over-sugars-role-in-obesity-20120330-1w3e5.html> ; <http://www.australianparadox.com/pdf/talktoyear3boys.pdf>

Board members, like the NHMRC, I am strongly of the opinion that sugar is a menace to public health. Please be aware, however, that my dispute with your influential scientists is not about science or nutrition, it is about simple stuff like up versus down, substantial versus trivial, basic arithmetic errors, the use of falsified data in self-published "peer reviewed" research, and the importance of Group of Eight scientists not poisoning important public debates with false information - in this case, the debate on the origins of obesity and type 2 diabetes, together the greatest public-health challenge of our times.

To get the ball rolling, please consider two obvious faults documented in Section 2 of my *GraphicEvidence* link above: the "**~600 g per person per year**" error (correction: ~150 g) and "**decreased by 10%**" error (correction: "increased by 30%"). I simply ask: is there any good reason for those blatant errors not to have been formally corrected alongside the authors' earlier formal correction of clumsy tangles in referencing?
<http://www.mdpi.com/2072-6643/3/8/734>

Late last month, disturbed by your scientists' latest attempt to claim that their obviously faulty *Australian Paradox* paper is flawless - this time in *BMC Public Health* journal - I wrote a letter to BioMed Central's Board of Trustees - <http://www.biomedcentral.com/about/trustees> - and hundreds of officials, editors and scientists associated with BioMed Central: <http://www.australianparadox.com/pdf/LetterBioMedCentral.pdf>

In response, a senior BioMed Central official assured me that the quality and origins of the University of Sydney's "shonky sugar study" are being investigated. I urge you - the University of Sydney's Academic Board - to pursue a similar investigation. **I propose that my *GraphicEvidence* document be used as Exhibit A for your investigation. Simply contrasting the published "findings" on Page 2 with the charts (Figures 1-11) that supposedly support those "findings" should convince you quickly that I am not wasting your time:** <http://www.australianparadox.com/pdf/GraphicEvidence.pdf>

Again, I am arguing near and far for the correction or retraction of the University of Sydney's extraordinarily faulty *Australian Paradox* paper. With respect, I urge the Academic Board to take that path in order to credibly re-introduce competence and integrity as priorities in "science" at the University of Sydney.

In my opinion, when influential and conflicted authors self-publish an extraordinarily faulty paper - a paper that is both an academic disgrace and a menace to public health - then common sense and the need for scientific integrity scream out for that research to be corrected or retracted. As you may know, the retraction of faulty papers is increasingly common in science: http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/02/science/study-finds-fraud-is-widespread-in-retracted-scientific-papers.html?_r=0

On the need for retractions of faulty papers to maintain the integrity of the scientific record, I must say that I admire the recent decisive action by University of Queensland's Vice-Chancellor, Professor Peter Høj:

...It is therefore with much disappointment that I inform you that the University has seen it necessary to seek a retraction of a paper ...Following extensive investigations, we do not have confidence in the research integrity of the paper ...UQ has asked the journal that published the paper to retract it ...By having the paper retracted, UQ enables the global scientific community to learn that the research reported in the paper has no place in the body of scientific knowledge, and so cannot be used as a basis for further research. I can assure you that UQ places the highest importance on upholding the integrity of our research and will not only continue to do so with vigilance but also seek to identify further measures to strengthen that endeavour.

<http://retractionwatch.wordpress.com/2013/09/03/aussie-university-asks-for-retraction-investigates-former-neurology-researcher-for-fraud/>

In summary, Academic Board members, both modern sugar consumption and shonky science are a menace to public health. That's why I am urging you to conduct a formal investigation into what I consider to be a serious episode of "research misconduct": Sections 1-10 at <http://www.australianparadox.com/>

Please forward this correspondence to those Board members who have not received this email, particularly the student representatives. I think it would be a good experience for your youngsters to observe how an Academic Board - an entity that gives proper priority to competence and integrity in "peer reviewed" research - simply throws shonky science under a bus. I think I mentioned that the negligent *Australian Paradox* "finding" relies on data that were falsified. While the data were not falsified by your scientists, your scientists should have noticed the **conspicuously flat falsified green line** in their own published charts. After all, they were wrestling with a "paradox": Figures 9 and 10 in <http://www.australianparadox.com/pdf/GraphicEvidence.pdf>

Whatever the outcome of your Board's investigations, I look forward to you advising me formally, at the appropriate time, of the result. I say that because there are hundreds of journalists who are being updated regularly on this matter, and there is a growing fascination globally about how this *Australian Paradox* scandal will end. The question many are asking, is whether the University of Sydney will do the right thing, or just timidly keep pretending that there is no problem, perhaps because lucrative pro-sugar revenues are at stake: (scroll down) <http://www.gisymbol.com/products-2/> ; (pp. 4-5) [http://www.foodhealthdialogue.gov.au/internet/foodandhealth/publishing.nsf/Content/D59B2C8391006638CA2578E600834BBD/\\$File/Resources%20and%20support%20for%20reformulation%20activities.pdf](http://www.foodhealthdialogue.gov.au/internet/foodandhealth/publishing.nsf/Content/D59B2C8391006638CA2578E600834BBD/$File/Resources%20and%20support%20for%20reformulation%20activities.pdf)

Just last week I was approached by a producer/director of current affairs programmes for Channel 4 (UK network primetime TV), asking about the *Australian Paradox* paper, the influence of the sugar lobby and how industry funded/friendly papers get such traction. I explained all I know, including the fact that the notoriously faulty *Australian Paradox* paper still is being cited by your Deputy Chairman of the Sydney University Nutrition Research Foundation – himself a representative of the sugar industry: <http://www.srasanz.org/about-us> - to argue that

Canberra is "Making a mess of obesity prevention": <http://scepticalnutritionist.com.au/?p=1093> ; http://sydney.edu.au/science/molecular_bioscience/nrf/council_members.php

In the discussion, I explained that my concerns about the University of Sydney's deep but unhealthy links to the sugar and sugary food industries would be reduced if the University simply corrected or retracted its obviously faulty pro-sugar paper. Of course, it's not just me: there is growing public understanding that the sugar industry and academia getting cuddly comes at a cost to scientific integrity and public health. For example, in the US, "Big Sugar" set out in the 1950s to scramble and mislead science on the links between sugar consumption and chronic diseases. On the way, Harvard University in the 1960s and 1970s became America's "most public defender" of "modern sugar consumption" as harmless, its "science" reportedly corrupted by heavy funding from the sugar and sugary foods industries: <http://www.motherjones.com/environment/2012/10/sugar-industry-lies-campaign>

In Australia, as you now know, the University of Sydney is home to our highest-profile (if somewhat ham-fisted) academic defenders of added sugar in food as harmless: http://assets.coca-colacompany.com/ba/22/39fae0564dcda20c694be368b8cf/TCCC_2010_Annual_Review_Per_Capita_Consumption.pdf ; <http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2013/s3868327.htm>

Board members, it is true that I am a nobody in the nutrition space. But I am a competent nobody. For example, I played a modest role providing some of the background research for ABC TV's *Catalyst* "Heart of the Matter Part 1 – Dietary Villains", resulting in a small "Thanks to" at the 28.50-minute mark: <http://www.abc.net.au/catalyst/stories/3876219.htm>

Moreover, I have enjoyed the robust public debate on these important matters of public health, including here: https://theconversation.com/viewing-catalysts-cholesterol-programs-through-the-sceptometer-19817#comment_252235 ; <http://retractionwatch.wordpress.com/2013/08/22/journal-to-feature-special-issue-on-scientific-misconduct-seeks-submissions/#comment-62012> ; https://theconversation.com/how-we-deal-with-alleged-research-misconduct-nhmrc-17101#comment_203994 ; <http://retractionwatch.wordpress.com/2013/10/03/science-reporter-spoofs-hundreds-of-journals-with-a-fake-paper/>

Finally, I hope to meet some of you at the Vice-Chancellor's Recognition Reception for donors *et al* this Friday evening. If you see me there, please come say hello. I will not be inclined to make the slightest fuss. I'm just a professional economist interested in the health of his kids, the health of Aboriginal kids in the places I grew up, and in public health more generally. Section 4 in the yellow link below provides further background on where I am coming from; there's also a list of a couple of hundred potential referees if you'd like to assess my ability to have a competent view on this serious matter under discussion.

Thanks very much for your time, and maybe see you on Friday evening.

Best wishes,
Rory

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rory robertson

[economist and former-fattie](#)

- **Join the push to give all kids a fairer start in life:** <http://www.australianparadox.com/pdf/Sugary-Drinks-Ban.pdf>
- **Outsized rates of sugar consumption – alongside alcohol and tobacco – are a major driver of *the unacceptable "gap" in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians*:** see the bottom row of Box/Table 2 in <https://www.mja.com.au/journal/2013/198/7/characteristics-community-level-diet-aboriginal-people-remote-northern-australia>
So, isn't it ironic - or worse - that the **\$500 million Charles Perkins Centre** is the new home of Australia's highest-profile academic defenders of added sugar in food as harmless? The CPC's research competence and integrity seems DOA: <http://www.smh.com.au/national/university-sets-up-500m-centre-for-obesity-research-20130724-2qjq8.html>

Comments, criticisms, questions, compliments, whatever welcome at strathburnstation@gmail.com

www.strathburn.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.htm>