

SUBMISSION TO THE STRATEGIC REVIEW OF HEALTH AND MEDICAL RESEARCH

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I beg leave to make a submission to the McKeon review suggesting future research that should attract funding.

As a long-time supporter of coconut production in the south Pacific (since 1959) and around the globe I am aware of the pivotal place of coconut in the nutrition of hundreds of millions of people in the tropical world. Coconut has been a staple ingredient of indigenous diets for thousands of years. The health of tropical peoples consuming a traditional diet is remarkably free from heart disease, diabetes, dementia and many other of the ailments commonly experienced in the non-tropical world.

In recent years many people in countries like Australia and USA and Europe have begun to use a product labeled Virgin Coconut Oil, and have reported remission in a number of conditions including dementia, Parkinson's disease and autism – all being connected with neurone and brain function. As well there has been a report from the Garvan Institute (November 2010) of coconut oil alleviating the symptoms of Type 2 diabetes in laboratory rats. In general coconut oil has been credited with a favourable impact on many adverse symptoms of gut function, but I want to concentrate on the brain function area in requesting that fnding be directed to a brain research institution to test the credibility of the many reports of case studies that can be found on the internet attributing favourable outcomes to the use of coconut oil. I noted with dismay that coconut is listed as a harmful saturated fat in the Australian Dietary Guidelines recently drafted by the National Health and Medical Research Council in spite of the new knowledge that it boosts HDL more than LDL forms of serum cholesterol.

I am aware that the pharmaceutical industry would have no interest in testing the effect of coconut oil on brain function as the opportunity for patenting a product is not available in this case. Therefore it falls back on the managers of public money to make a decision with respect to funding research. Confirmation of favourable effects of coconut oil on health would not only deliver relief to a many sufferers but would also benefit the producers of coconut oil. In general, these are small-holders struggling to achieve a worthwhile cash income from a product that has, in the past, been vilified as a heart risk by the marketers of poly-unsaturated oils thereby suffering loss in demand. Increased demand for coconut oil to alleviate brain-related pathologies would improve the lives of coconut producers thereby reducing the need for many AUSAID supported programs to subsidise their needs for health, education and other services.