



## ***Media Release***

### **INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE IN AUSTRALIA SEEKS WAYS TO AVOID WORLDWIDE EPIDEMIC OF MENTAL ILLNESS**

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**HOW to avoid an epidemic of mental illness and other brain disorders that experts warn will be the world's largest single health problem within a decade is a focus of an international conference in Australia later this year.**

**This follows a conference in London last month where researchers who were described as the world's foremost authorities in neuroscience and nutrition warned of "unthinkable health, social and fiscal consequences" unless there is increased consumption of DHA, an Omega-3 oil found most abundantly in seafood.**

**Many of these researchers will gather again at the International Seafood & Health Conference (ISHC) in Melbourne in November.**

**ISHC Chairman Mr Roy Palmer said the conference would pursue answers to many of the issues raised at last month's London conference. One of the major issues discussed would be mental ill health and other brain disorders.**

**"In London, these experts warned that brain disorders and mental ill health will be the top two burdens of ill health worldwide by 2020, and are the greatest threat to humankind today," Mr Palmer said.**

**"They issued a statement calling for 'a new focus to be placed on policies for health, food, agriculture, pollution of aquatic and marine resources and their rational use, with restoration of traditional fish and seafood consumption'. DHA, or Docosahexaenoic Acid, is essential for good health but consumption in most societies is far lower than it should be.**

**"Professor Michael Crawford, Director of the Institute of Brain Chemistry & Human Nutrition at London Metropolitan University, and patron of the Melbourne conference, is arguing for what he calls 'action at the most fundamental level to circumvent the mental health epidemic facing our society'.**

**"He believes the bulk of the mental health issues could potentially be addressed and the impending rise in disorders reversed through adequate nutrition but says the issue must be addressed in: school-level education; maternal and infant nutrition; food, agricultural and fisheries policies; and moving to address river, estuarine and coastal pollution.**

**"These issues will be explored at the Melbourne conference in a search for solutions to a looming global crisis, and we have invited state and federal health and fisheries ministers, and their senior bureaucrats, from Australia and elsewhere to join in this discussion with world leaders in the field.**

**It is critical the world identifies ways to provide adequate nutrition for a fast-growing population ensures sustainability of seafood stocks and communicates health messages that will change behaviour.**

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**"At present, the major issue for western nations like Australia is simply lack of recognition by most people about the need to improve their diet with more DHA but, in future, issues of sustainability, supply and food security will come into play.**

**"The Melbourne conference comes at a critical time and potentially will have a very significant role in shaping major decisions surrounding nutrition and mental health worldwide over the next decade."**

**Mr Palmer said a number of current health issues related to seafood would be examined at the International Seafood & Health Conference.**

**"For example, Associate Professor Barbara Meyer, from the School of Health Sciences at the University of Wollongong, has found Australian children are not consuming enough Omega-3. Only 6 per cent of Australian children are achieving the recommended DHA daily intake and nine out of every 10 children are not consuming seafood, too low for optimum health.**

**"We know that 1.6 billion people worldwide are suffering from iodine deficiency, including large numbers of Australian children. The Australian Thyroid Foundation recently said more than 50 per cent of Australian women and children are iodine deficient. Again, seafood is one of the best natural sources of iodine.**

**"Selenium deficiency is a problem in many parts of the world, and this triggers several different auto-immune diseases, including thyroid disorders and psoriasis. Selenium deficiency also causes susceptibility to heart disease and to viral infections. Seafood is a major source of selenium."**

**Mr Palmer said the conference had attracted United Nations support and was recognised as a major international event.**

**"The UN Food & Agriculture Organization (FAO) will be presenting their report on the risks versus benefits of eating seafood, prepared by their Expert Committee, and a number of members will be here.**

**"For Australia, this is potentially a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to harness many of the world's finest health researchers in a common purpose to develop answers to some of the serious health problems facing us and the rest of the world."**

**The International Seafood & Health Conference will be held at the Melbourne Exhibition Centre from Sunday, November 7 to Wednesday, November 10, and the related Wonders & Opportunities of the Oceans Exhibition from Saturday, November 6 to Tuesday, November 9. See: <http://seafoodhealthconference.com>**

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