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Food policy development in the Australian state of Victoria: A case study of the Food Alliance

Abstract

This article explores the development of a food policy body called the Food Alliance and the role of the organisation in encouraging the development of food policy that integrates health and ecological issues. The Food Alliance is located within the Australian state of Victoria. A policy triangle is used as a framework to describe and analyse the work of the Food Alliance. Lessons are drawn about effective strategies for influencing integrated food policy. This occurs in a context where food policy typically favours powerful industry and agricultural interests and where relationships between the health and environmental sectors are in their infancy. The implications for planning and organising a state wide food policy are explored from the perspective of policy and the ways in which this can be influenced through working with key stakeholders.

Introduction

The development of food policy in Australia has a chequered history. There have been a number of attempts to develop comprehensive food policies at both national and state level, but most attempts have either floundered or resulted in food policies that favour powerful industry and agricultural interests and economic outcomes over health, environment and welfare ones (Caraher, Coveney and Lang, 2005).

The Australian government committed to the development of an integrated food and nutrition policy following the 1992 International Conference on Nutrition (ICN) and the 1996 World Food Summit (WFS). At this time, the Federal government considered adopting ecological standards in its food policy, but the opportunity was lost when industry exerted its influence and argued that such a position would impede trade and result in an increase in food prices (Alden, 2012).

At a state level, both Queensland and Western Australia have developed food policies oriented towards the economic development of the food industry (Queensland Government, 2011; Ministry of Food and Agriculture, West Australian Government, 2009). Tasmania, which has a long history of food policy development, has also recently revised its food policy (Tasmanian Food Security Council, 2012), focusing on food insecurity, but with little to say about the state's food system. The state of Victoria

launched a food and nutrition policy in 1987, this was launched under a Labor government but was watered down when a Liberal-National coalition took power in 1992, on the basis of economic reform and being more industry friendly.

A National Food Plan is under consideration in 2012 but, once again, industry interests seem likely to dominate (Food Alliance, 2011) and the Green Paper has been launched in July 2012 led by the departments which deal with food as an industry (Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, 2012). Federal and state governments see the growing demand for meat and dairy products in Asia as an opportunity for Australia and the state of Victoria to develop as 'the food bowl of Asia' (Callick, 2012; Gray, 2012); without due attention to issues of sustainability, free trade and the movement of chronic diseases across borders through the agency of food (Lang, Barling and Caraher, 2009)

All this raises issues regarding what Morgan (2009, p 342) has called the '*new food equation*' and the challenges for the '*food planning community*'. As Morgan points out, the food planning community is not homogenous but diverse and multi-dimensional. This creates problems in trying to reach consensus on a wide range of issues related to food (American Planning Association, 2007), as well as issues of multi-level governance and crossing departmental boundaries (Barling, Lang and Caraher, 2001). Traditionally food policy or planning has been confined to a narrow range of interests, often working in separate areas or 'silos' of endeavour.

One way of addressing these 'governmentality' issues has been the establishment of food policy councils - cross-sectoral bodies that work at the intersection of health, social justice and environmental sustainability to improve local and regional food systems and to influence government policy (Harper et al, 2009; Schiff, 2007). This article focuses on the establishment of an Australian food policy body called the Food Alliance. The Food Alliance was established in 2009 to promote food policy that integrates ecological, public health, social justice and economic objectives (Egger and Swinburn, 2010). It shares many of the objectives and characteristics of food policy councils outlined in table 1, but with some key differences.

Winne (2008) sets out an example of food policy councils in operation, as does Stierand (2012). The American Planning Association (2011) sees the key characteristics of food policy councils as set out in table 1.

Table 1 Defining Characteristics of Food Policy Councils (adapted from American Planning Association, 2011)

Common objectives	Common characteristics
Advocate for policy change to improve a community's food system	Take a comprehensive approach
Develop programs that address gaps in a community's food system	Pursue long-term strategies
Strategize solutions that have wide applicability to the food system	Offer tangible solutions
Research and analyze the existing conditions of a community's food system	Are area-based
Communicate information about a community's food system and various sectors	Advocate on behalf of the community
Cultivate partnerships among differing food sectors	Seek government buy-in
Convene meetings with diverse stakeholders of a community's food system	Establish formal membership
	Operate with limited funds and resources

There are now over 100 food policy councils in North America (Morgan, 2009). The focus of these councils typically extends beyond the issue of food for urban populations, with the realisation that cities cannot address food supply issues without considering food growing areas in their hinterlands and the encroachment of the urban landscape into agricultural land (Steel, 2008; Straessle, 2007; Derkzen and Morgan, 2012; Cohen, 2012; World Health Organization, 1999).

The Food Alliance is located in the state of Victoria. Victoria is Australia's biggest agricultural producer and a significant exporter of dairy, meat and grain products (DPI, 2011) with various powerful industry lobbies. The State is the most densely populated in Australia, with seventy five per cent of the population living in the urban area of Melbourne - the state capital. Victoria lacks a comprehensive state food policy, and an attempt to develop one in 2010 failed. The Food Alliance is funded by the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth), a foundation which receives Aus\$30m annually for health promotion activities from the Victorian state government (VicHealth, 2005) The primary remit of the Food Alliance is to promote food policy developments that address the structural determinants of healthy and sustainable eating. It aims to achieve a food system that is healthy, environmentally sustainable, fair and economically prosperous and it promotes integrated food policy that delivers multiple benefits across these areas.

The environmental sustainability, economic and public health issues facing Victoria's food system are common to many parts of the world, but climatic and soil conditions in this region are particularly challenging. The floods in Victoria in 2010-11, and the over-allocation of water in the river system that irrigates the nation's main food bowl, the Murray-Darling Basin, have highlighted the fragility of an agricultural system which was essentially imposed on the continent (Vanclay, and Lawrence, 1995). Australia is the driest inhabited continent in the world and this has implications for food production (Flannery, 2005). Australia is also unique in never having gone through a pastoral system of development. In effect, it by-passed the development of its own indigenous system of agriculture and imported a European model (Flannery 2005; Symons 2007; Caraher and Carey, 2010). Agricultural systems were introduced that are not well suited to Australia's climate or its soils, and this has led to significant degradation of land and waterways (Commissioner of Environmental Sustainability, 2008).

Other concerns raised about the current system of food production in Victoria include the distances food travels (Gaballa and Abraham, 2007), the dependence of the system on oil, population growth especially in urban areas (Larsen, Ryan and Abraham, 2008), the impact of low farmgate prices on the financial viability of farming and the impacts of the current food system on population health (Carey and McConell, 2011). Around half of Victorian adults are overweight or obese (Department of Health, 2012; VicHealth, 2011). Chronic disease such as diabetes and heart disease represents approximately 80% of the total burden of disease and rates of these conditions are predicted to rise. Poor nutrition is estimated to be responsible for 16% of the total burden of disease in Victoria and is the largest cause of ill health in Victoria with a greater health impact than tobacco smoking -8.2% of all disability adjusted life years (DALYs) (Department of Human Services, 2005). Nearly six per cent of Victorians experienced food insecurity in 2008, with some geographic areas experiencing rates of up to 12.6 per cent (Department of Health 2012). Huntley (2008) suggests these figures may be an underestimate of the extent of food insecurity.

Methodology

Using Walt and Gilson's health policy triangle (1994) as a framework, this paper analyses 'who' has been involved in the development of food policy in Victoria, 'how' and 'why' (Kingdon, 2010). The triangle places actors at the centre and uses the organising areas of context and processes as analytical features (Buse, 2005). Additionally, using

Kingdon's (2010) streams of policy development to further develop analysis in the four sectors of the policy triangle (actors, context, content and process).

The focus of this article is to identify and clarify the role of the Food Alliance within the context of food policy development in Victoria, to describe the lessons learned in attempting to influence the development of integrated food policy in the state and to explore possible future directions for the organisation. Using Walt and Gilson's policy triangle (1994) a case study of the Food Alliance has been developed (Thomas, 2011). The various elements of the case study are set out in figure 1 (see the Findings section). Case studies are used to address various questions and issues, however the findings from case studies themselves cannot be used to extrapolate to other cases. What is useful and purposeful about case studies is that they can be useful in addressing learning about process, content and actors (Thomas, 2011). Thus they complement the process set out by Walt and Gilson (1995) as well as Kingdon (2010) and can be particularly useful in outlining policy where other approaches may not be appropriate (Yin, 2008; Thomas, 2011).

Cohen (2012) has recently used Kingdon's model and its three components to describe and analyse food policy development in New York City. The three components of the model are 1). problem formation and recognition, 2). the formation and refining of policy proposals and 3). politics. Kingdon sees the streams as interacting but distinct. We take the approach with reference to food policy that the process is less linear and comprehensive than Kingdon argues (Lang, Barling and Caraher, 2009). Many food policy issues are at an early stage and embryonic, as in the present case study of the Food Alliance (Lang, Barling and Caraher, 2009, Barling, Lang and Caraher, 2001). Problem definition of food policy agendas may also lead to agreement but the solutions are not so easily agreed upon. For example, there is general agreement on the problem of obesity (problem formation), but less on the policy solutions (as in the areas of formation and refining of policy proposals and the politics of the actors and issues). So, agriculture and the food industry may agree on the problem of obesity but see the solutions within health promotion paradigms as opposed to changes in the food production system. See Gibney (2012, pp 102-113) for a discussion of this range of actors.

The sources of data for this article have been drawn from existing reports and documents in the public domain and complemented by authors' direct experience,

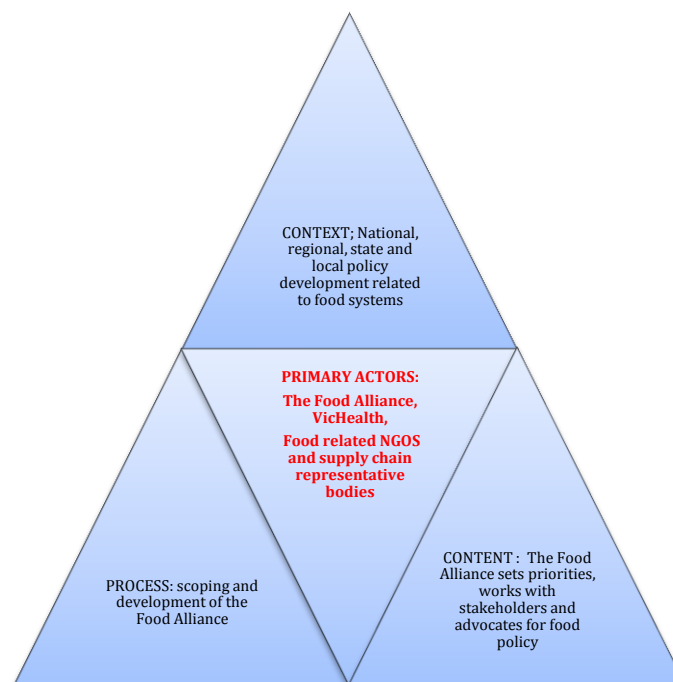
knowledge and involvement in the processes of policy development in the Australian and State of Victoria contexts. Some of the key reports and documents were identified from Alden's (2012) work and attempts were made to identify all key state and federal policies or developments since 2007. Reports and submissions to key policy bodies made by the Food Alliance were also used as sources of evidence.

Documentation was first of all analysed by one of the authors (MC), then cross checked by another author (RC) and then further commented on and/or amended by the remaining authors at the time of writing the article through various drafts.

Findings

The findings are set out under three headings of: context, players/actors and process/content; the latter sections have been combined as there is an overlap between processes and content. Figure 1 sets out the schematic structure of reporting.

Figure 1. The policy triangle as applied to the establishment of the Food Alliance, adapted from Walt and Gilson, 1994



Context

The introduction set out some of the more general issues emerging under the rubrics of problems, policy and context. More detail about the establishment of the Food Alliance in the milieu of both national/federal and state level developments are provided. The

tensions in developing food policy in the state of Victoria are reflected in the differing interests, roles and powers of various government departments at both a federal and state level. This is in addition to the importance and power of the food industry, as set out in the introduction. State Departments of Primary Industries (DPI), which have responsibility for agriculture, see it as just another industry, with food as another product to grow, sell and export (the report from The State of Victoria/Department of Primary Industry, Farm Services 2009 is such an example). They view health education and health promotion as functions of the Department of Health, but do not see a role for the department in changing the food system or aligning it to the health needs of the population, a common problem in developing food policy (Lang, Barling and Caraher, 2009). On the other hand, departments of primary industry and agriculture often see health and animal welfare concerns as potential barriers to trade and profit.

The major steps to integrating food policy in Australia have originated with civil society organisations, who have responded to concerns about the health, environmental and social impacts of Australia's current food system with calls for whole of government food policy at both federal and state level (Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance, 2011; Cultivating Community, 2011). At a federal level, the Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) launched a discussion document, 'A Future for Food', in 2009 and a follow up in 2012 (PHAA, 2009 & 2012). These documents have been important in stimulating debate and widening the focus of public health to include environmental and climate change issues. The food industry, farming groups and other civil society groups have also called for a coordinated federal policy response (e.g. Australian Food and Grocery Council, 2011; National Farmers Federation, 2011), and in 2011, the Federal Government began a public consultation around a national food plan (Australian Government, 2011). With this increased level of activity in the food policy arena, new cross-sectoral alliances have formed within civil society at both state and federal level that aim to raise the priority of public interest concerns within food policy. At a federal level, the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance, involving over 100 community groups, emerged in response to the National Food Plan initiative and, at a state level, the Sydney Food Fairness Alliance formed in New South Wales to advocate for the development of a state government food policy.

In 1987, the State of Victoria produced a Food and Nutrition Policy (Department of Agriculture & Rural Affairs, Health Department Victoria, Ministry of Education, 1987; Lawrence, 1987; Powles, et al, 1992). This focused on the nutrition aspects of food

policy, underpinned by and consistent with economic and social justice strategies. This was at the time innovative and ground breaking in that it also identified a stream of funding to help develop the initiative. This resulted in the establishment of a unit at Deakin University to develop policy interventions at the community level (Lawrence, 1987; Powles, et al, 1992), in one sense this can be seen as a forerunner of the current Food Alliance, reflecting what Kingdon (2010) and Howlett (1995) call policy cycles. The policy and the support work ended in 1992 when a new state government began to develop a new policy which was focused on nutrition and more food industry friendly. Support was withdrawn for community policy work and money for the unit at Deakin was ended. This is a common background theme in the development of food policy, particularly in a state such as Victoria, where the agricultural and food production sectors are key players both in the domestic and export markets. The food industry, and indeed some government departments, see health concerns with the food production system as a threat to economic prosperity and use their influence to water down these concerns in food policy. Since the development of the 1987 food and nutrition policy, a more complex set of circumstances related to food production has emerged into the public domain, such as ecology, the role of the food industry, peak oil etc (Lang, Barling and Caraher, 2009). The number of actors involved has also increased, but some actors are more powerful than others, with departments of primary industry among the most powerful.

Another key player in the food policy arena in the state of Victoria is VicHealth, a foundation funded from state monies (VicHealth, 2005). These monies were originally from hypothecated tobacco taxes. Following the 1987 food and nutrition policy, VicHealth developed a nutrition strand to its work (Department of Agriculture & Rural Affairs, Health Department Victoria, Ministry of Education, 1987; VicHealth, 2011). In 2007, VicHealth called a meeting of national and international experts, including industry, to look at ways to progress an integrated food policy. This was subject to the Chatham House Rule, and involved three of the authors of this article (MC, KMcC & ML). At the time, people were beginning to address the idea of an ecological public health approach to food, involving all dimensions from paddock to plate (Barling, Lang and Caraher, 2001; Caraher, Coveney and Lang, 2005). The concept of 'ecological public health' is set out in work by Lang, Barling and Caraher (2009), Hawkes et al (2012) and McMichael (2003). 'Ecological public health' describes sustainable development as a world-view, with a holistic approach to how society, the economy and culture can be organized to protect planetary health. The term is an attempt to reformulate what is

meant by health, seeing food as an intersection point for human, societal and planetary relations. The environment is the infrastructure and context within which humans live and eat. How humans eat has an impact on the environment, simultaneously affecting population health, and of course vice versa, with environments determining food production and diet.

Ideas explored at this time, included ways of going beyond the traditional boundaries of health to incorporate agriculture, the food industry and regulation. In the interim period, VicHealth provided AUS\$5 million of funding for eight local government areas to address food security (VicHealth, 2011). The evaluation of this initiative highlighted that the communities faced state and national barriers to integrated food policy, which led to VicHealth commissioning further work on the establishment of what became the Food Alliance (VicHealth, 2011). One of the models proposed was based on a combination of academic research and outreach/advocacy (Loff, Wood, Crammond and McConell, et al, 2009). This resulted in an invitation to tertiary academic institutions in Victoria to tender for three years funding to support the development of a food policy coalition. The contract was awarded to Deakin University, Melbourne and the Food Alliance was set up with an initial three years of funding to support two part-time staff working on key issues, with additional inputs from volunteers. The Food Alliance is governed by an Executive, Advisory Council and a Deakin University Management Team. This mirrors the process and activity, described earlier, in the period 1987-1992.

The above reflects what Howlett (1995) calls the policy cycle. Repetitions and opportunities occur in the food policy cycle, and here can be seen the problem presenting itself, but the opportunities and politics not being in line until 2009/10. Some of the new circumstances that gave rise to this were the growing concern with obesity and the recognition of the contribution of food systems to environmental impacts.

The Players/Actors

The central players for the purposes of this section are the Food Alliance and VicHealth, as was noted in the previous section on policy context. VicHealth (2005), recognised the need for a food policy coordinating body and funded its establishment. A third actor was the University sector, who were asked to tender to establish such a body in 2010 but whose influence and role has diminished over time. Figure 1 shows the key players and a summary of the influencing factors such as policy context (as set out above in the

previous section). Also important in the process of formation of the Food Alliance was a consultation with community food groups (Loff, Wood, Crammond, McConell et al, 2009).

Table 2 sets out stakeholders that the Food Alliance has worked with in the development of food policy. Among this set of actors are state government departments whose actions influence food policy, the civic society groups that advocate on health, environmental sustainability and social justice issues related to food policy, and key actors across the food supply chain. The data for this table was drawn from the Food Alliance’s own reports, submissions and website, as well as reports from the named organisations and bodies below. The Food Alliance works primarily at the state level, but the interaction of state and federal governments through the Council of Australian Governments provides an opportunity to also influence the federal policy arena.

Table 2 shows the influence and work of the Food Alliance at state level, the work of the Alliance recognizes that state policy activities are influenced by national policy and with this in mind they engage with national food policy initiatives eg the national food plan, Australian Parents’ Jury, the Planning Institute of Australia and environmental groups such as Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace -the reality is that policy issues do not recognise state boundaries and there is an iterative process between both levels.

Table 2: Examples of stakeholders the Food Alliance has worked with

Government actors within the State of Victoria	Civic society actors working in the State	Supply chain actors working in the State
Department of Primary Industries	Heart Foundation	Victorian Farmers Federation
Department of Health	Victorian Local Governance Association	Retailers (Coles, Woolworths, Aldi and Independent Grocers of Australia)
Department of Planning and Community Development	Public health and food policy university departments	Vegetable Growers Association of Victoria (and the industry marketing groups for other food commodities)
Department of	Food recovery groups	Organic industry groups

Sustainability and the Environment	(Food banks and waste recovery groups such as Second Bite)	
VicHealth	CERES (a community environment park that runs fair food social enterprises)	Melbourne Market Authority (responsible for wholesale markets)
Regional Development Victoria (responsible for economic development in rural and regional areas)	Cultivating Community (supports the development of community gardens)	Logistics and freight
Local government councils and the group of Peri-Urban Councils	Broad alliances around water and mining issues	
Melbourne City Council and its food policy with implications	Victorian Eco-Innovation Lab, which is a University based consultancy group focused on sustainable cities.	

It is important to note that many of the actors above are also primary influencers of policy in their own terms. For the work of the Food Alliance, they become targets to ensure that integrated food policy is delivered and cross sectional/multi-disciplinary agendas are linked and integrated as the attempt is made to move outside silo-based work.

Content and Processes

Under this heading are set out some of the key areas of work for the Food Alliance in its first couple of years of operation. Activity is focused at a state level, but advocacy in some areas also crosses over into the federal arena. The Food Alliance, in consultation with stakeholders, decided on three areas of work, which had substantial evidence bases and examples of existing work. The three areas are set out below, with the first reference after each area designating international academic work which helped inform the activity and the second reference in each case setting out the work/activities of the Food Alliance:

- A resilient fruit and vegetable supply for Victoria (see Morgan, Marsden, & Murdoch, 2006; Carey and McConell, 2011).
- Healthy and sustainable public sector procurement (influenced by the work of Morgan & Sonnino, 2008; see website for details and position statement - <http://www.foodalliance.org.au/projects/public-sector-food/>).
- Development of healthy and sustainable food policy (Lang, Barling and Caraher, 2009; Food Alliance, 2011).

The Food Alliance has made progress on all of these matters and had influences on many organisations in the state (see table 3 below). A key development is that many organisations look to the Food Alliance as a leader on food issues, especially those which link ecological sustainability and health.

Table 3. Examples of work developed and influences on other organisations *

Example of policy	Evidence of the Influence of Food Alliance	Other organisations impacted at a secondary/tertiary level
City of Melbourne (2012) Food Policy	The breath of the vision with the integration of sustainability, health and social equity as key considerations	Other local councils that look to the City of Melbourne for direction in food policy development.
VicHealth (2011) food systems component	The need for a sustainable food supply and sustainable procurement are among the key principles accepted by the organisation	The focus on sustainable and integrated food policy especially as local government level.
Healthy Food Procurement for government and funded services	The Victorian Department of Health is undertaking a project to explore the development of food procurement guidelines to increase healthy food choices across government funded sectors (Department of Health, 2012a)	Local councils and state government departments
State Department of Health's Healthy Food Connect	Development of local food policy coalitions in 12 pilot Local Government Areas to increase access	Local councils and other partners involved in the development of local food

initiative to support the establishment of local food coalitions	to healthy foods (Department of Health, 2012a).	policy coalitions.
State Department of Health's Healthy Food Charter which contains principles to inform healthy eating at a state and local level	Inclusion of a sustainability principle (focused on local, seasonal foods) in the Victorian Healthy Food Charter (Department of Health, 2012a)	Local councils and other partners working with the Victorian government to promote access to healthy food.
State-level Inter-Departmental Committee on Food	A 'whole of government' Inter-Departmental Committee on Food was established to develop a Victorian food strategy, which was not published.	Despite the disbanding of the state food strategy, working relationships established during the policy's development continue to have influence.
The Parliamentary Inquiry into Environmental Design and Public Health in Victoria	The Inquiry Committee included Food Alliance recommendations on identifying and protecting agricultural land and assessing the public health issues around food production in its final report (Legislative Council Environment and Planning References Committee, 2012).	State government departments and local councils.
Dietitians' Association of Australia	Establishment of an environmental interest group.	Influence on activity at state level.

*The source of data for this table was the formal submissions and evidence provided to the above bodies as well as the subsequent reports or policy documents emerging.

The above table does not claim direct influence or attribution of the actions of the Food Alliance, merely that they were part of the process of influence.

Discussion

Discussions of some of the reasons for the particular trajectory that the Food Alliance has taken in its development are set out. In doing this we identify some of the lessons learned in attempting to influence the development of food policy focused on health, welfare, environmental sustainability and social equity in a political environment that clearly favours economic development. Finally some possible future directions for the Food Alliance and others interested in pursuing such a line of development are set out.

What becomes clear is the gap between intention as set out in the tender and contracts for the establishment of a food alliance. The reality is that the Alliance had to deliver on some outcomes and could not exclusively focus on the process of developing a membership and active stakeholder base. Equally, stakeholders were looking for deliverables from this new entry to the food arena. It is also evident from the data that the Food Alliance entered - a lively arena of food activism and had to develop a distinct role that did not overlap with the work of stakeholders. The original tender documents for the establishment of the Food Alliance proposed that the organisation should operate on the dual basis of the UK-based group Sustain (see www.sustainweb.org) and the Centre for Food Policy (CFP) at City University, London (Loff, Crammond, McConell et al, 2009). The Food Alliance has links and regularly liaises with both these groups, one of the current authors (MC) from the CFP was attached to the Food Alliance while he was 'Thinker in Residence' at Deakin in 2012. These two bodies reflect contrasting and at times conflicting models of policy operation. Sustain has a membership base of organisations complemented by a series of programmes that combine activism with lobbying and campaigning around food and sustainability issues. The CFP is an academic unit which researches issues of food policy and whose staff also sit on and advise food policy making bodies; the Centre has a clear civic society focus and generally does not accept food industry monies, but it is primarily an academic organisation and not a campaigning one. The attempt to link the two models seems to have been based on adding credibility to the establishment of a Food Alliance by association with an academic body. The short to medium term development of the Food Alliance was and is dependent on building community relationships with food groups at the state and federal levels. This location may not be the best position for the Food Alliance to build and develop these relationships. This is not to deny that there are advantages in such

academic links but they need to be handled sensitively and lines drawn between academic work and the development of food policy. The advantages of locating the Food Alliance within a university setting include a link to a research base to strengthen the advocacy position and the backing and support of a multi-disciplinary organisation. However basing the tender on an unproven model is questionable. Both the Centre for Food Policy and Sustain have developed over time and are dependent on key individuals for their identities and activism. Murcott (1999, p 297) points out that there is a dearth of literature and evidence on academic pressure groups such as the Centre for Food Policy. The 'ivory towers' of academia may be a barrier to developing relationships with community organisations, especially when policy advocacy is called for (see Gibney, 2012). Gibney is also critical of the rise of NGOs who push and promote nutrition 'science' agendas in the pursuit of social claims.

For the Food Alliance, it quickly became apparent that the development of a membership-based organisation would not be feasible within the initial funding period and that there was a need to focus on the delivery of outcomes to meet the expectations of funders and stakeholders. Instead of implementing a membership-based model, the Food Alliance focused on facilitating flexible, cross-sectoral alliances, drawn from stakeholder organisations, and based around common issues of interest, 1) a resilient fruit and vegetable supply scheme, 2) public sector food procurement and 3) the development of whole of government food policy. A key area for future development was identified as protection of the peri-urban environment and the encroachment of cityscapes into agricultural land (Straessle, 2007). This latter issue has, of course, links to all three priority areas identified above. A key lesson in the development of the work of the Food Alliance is that issues of interest typically have multiple dimensions related to health, environmental sustainability, social equity and economic prosperity. This allows stakeholder organisations to relate to the issue and to each other through the lens of different dimensions (Winne, 2008). The key to developing alliances around common issues is to assist stakeholders from different sectors to hear and understand the perspectives of other stakeholder groups on the issue and to identify common ground where objectives overlap.

One of the potential looming developments, is in the establishment of 12 food policy coalitions in local authority areas from 2012 to 2015. This may provide the base for the development of a more formal food policy council with a formal membership (see table 1) as outlined by the American Planning Association (2012). This is where the current

Food Alliance is more than and less than a traditional food policy council. It is not grounded in community or formal membership bases but does meet most of the other activities and characteristics set out by the American Planning Association (2012).

The Food Alliance while, sharing many of the objectives and characteristics of a food policy council as set out earlier in table 1, is both less and more than a typical food policy council (American Planning Association, 2012, Winne, 2008; Stierand, 2012). It is not rooted nor has it emerged from community politics and dissatisfaction with the food chain. It has a focus on stakeholders as opposed to members and operates as an umbrella body for larger health and ecological concerns. It has learned that flexible alliances, based on action, around issues of interest have many advantages over a membership-based governance structure for a fledgling organisation. Alliances can be established opportunistically, can develop in response to the advocacy issue, require little commitment on the part of the stakeholders involved and are particularly well suited to a context where relationships between sectors are in their infancy. This was the situation in Victoria at the time that the Food Alliance was established. Civic society organisations in Victoria, much like their government counterparts, have tended to work 'in silos' within their own sectors and in order to build effective long-term alliances across sectors, there is much work to be done in building relationships, trust, a common understanding of the issues and of the ecological nature of food and the policies needed to tackle them (Lang, Barling and Caraher, 2009). Flexible alliances provide a non-threatening way for organisations to 'dip their toes in the water' of relationship-building with organisations in other sectors that may have quite different positions on the issues. To bring together two previously discrete sectors, i.e. health and environment, extensive groundwork is needed to develop mutual understanding of issues and develop trust. The collaboration offers opportunities to all parties to pursue mutually acceptable agendas. This means working on common ground, stating intentions within contexts that are acceptable, using language that is acceptable to all parties and finding what motivates other players e.g. fruit and vegetable consumption or income for farmers. This sometimes means picking agendas and campaigns that are winnable in some form. As Winne (2008) says, '*pick the low hanging fruit*'. This was the rationale behind the choice of the three programmes of work (fruit and vegetable supply; public sector procurement and a healthy and sustainable food policy) based on feasibility, impact, relationship development and changes to the food chain. Additionally, the focus on the micro and meso level was a pragmatic decision to work at a level where outcomes were achievable, not perceived as threatening and a long-term

strategy to develop a case for changes in the dominant food system. This was necessary in a state which is the biggest agricultural producer in Australia and the site of so many vested industry interests, many of which are reflected in key government departments, such as primary industries.

The Food Alliance was established at a time when there was significant interest by the Victorian government in developing 'whole of government' food policy, and an Inter-Departmental Committee was established of senior representatives from across relevant government departments to develop a food strategy for the state. However, nearly two years of work on the strategy came to an abrupt halt almost overnight when a new government was ushered in at the state election in 2010. The Food Alliance has adapted to this new set of circumstances by approaching the development of integrated food policy as a '*way of working/thinking*' on food-related initiatives that are currently on the table or have a reasonable chance of ending up on the table, rather than continuing to advocate for a comprehensive state government food policy that is unlikely to emerge under the current circumstances. In practice, this means that the Food Alliance is constantly exploring opportunities to stretch the scope of policy initiatives that originate from one area or government department (e.g. Department of Health or Primary Industries) so that they also achieve policy objectives in other dimensions (e.g. environmental sustainability or social equity). This is in line with Kingdon's (2010) concept of refining policy content and proposals relative to the politics of the time.

Approaching the development of integrated food policy in this way has a number of benefits. It provides a way for government departments to experiment with working in an integrated way on discrete policy initiatives without committing 'lock, stock and barrel' to a comprehensive 'whole of government' food policy approach. It also enables the validity of an integrated approach to be demonstrated on discrete projects and provides opportunities to gather evidence of the benefits of the approach in order to present a case for a more comprehensive action in future. Lastly, it recognises that when government chooses not to act, it is still possible to achieve an integrated way of working that delivers benefits across multiple policy dimensions through projects that involve other groups of actors.

The three priority areas of the Food Alliance helped to focus the work and provided opportunities for a new organisation that has limited resources and capacity. One of the

ways that the Food Alliance has addressed its capacity constraints is by seeing itself as a 'catalyst' or 'facilitator' for projects that achieve an integrated approach to food policy, rather than acting as the 'deliverer' of the project. Much of the work of the Food Alliance is in fostering the fledgling relationships between stakeholders in different sectors, seeding initiatives and projects that will enable those relationships to develop and in identifying opportunities to create significant shifts in the underlying food policy landscape.

Attempts to influence major players in the food system to become more sustainable has proved to be challenging but also beyond the resources allocated to the Food Alliance. This again relates to the setting of three programmes of activity by the Alliance to focus activities. For the state of Victoria, the lesson learned is the importance of working with local agricultural and producer interests in a state where agriculture is such an important part of the economy and is akin to Kingdon's (2010) politics component. This is also vital in order to address the structural determinants, and a good place to start is in fruit and vegetable supply, where significant potential exists for common ground in relation to goals around healthy eating, sustainable supply of local, seasonal produce and economic goals associated with growing high value industries as part of vibrant regional economies (Morgan and Sonnino, 2008). The to-ing and fro-ing of policy opportunities since the 1980s shows, as Howlett (1995) describes it, 'policy cycles,' where the areas of actors, processes, content and context or opportunity do not always align, as was the case in 1992 following a change of State government. What the present case study does show is that you have to be ready when the opportunity presents itself. Kingdon's (2010) three streams metaphor is instructive here. The problem stream has been the constant throughout the policy cycles, albeit expanding to encompass an ecological agenda. The political and policy streams have been the determinants of whether or not the Food Alliance has gained traction. This means continuing work at a local level to build coalitions and understanding and to be ready when the (political and policy) context is favourable (Kingdon, 2010; Cohen, 2012; Winne, 2008).

In its two years of existence the Food Alliance has learned about the processes of policy development and in this time has developed a number of strands of action. Its influence on organisations at micro (community) and meso state levels of action is impressive. The remaining arena of action will be to influence the food policy agenda at the macro (federal) level of activity and with a wider range of actors. What it has done is to co-ordinate existing actions and activity under new headings where alliance and agreement

can be achieved. It has instigated discussions around some controversial areas, such as the power of the food industry and the over-reliance of government on food as a product, but has not got bogged down in these debates, choosing to move to areas where agreement can be reached and actions developed. The development of food policy in Victoria and the role of the Food Alliance is now established and funding identified for the near future, but some key considerations and challenges remain for the Food Alliance and others wishing to adopt a similar approach to food policy:

- The opportunity to develop a membership-based structure, once the relationships between stakeholder organisations and some work-streams are established
- Long-term sustainability related to widening the sources of funding and identifying funding from sustainable/ecological sources to provide a broader platform of operation, currently there is too much reliance on health sector funding,
- Balancing the portfolio of work and delivery of services with the ability to campaign and provide an independent voice in matters related to food policy,
- To build media profile and encourage community understanding of and participation in food system issues,

As was noted in the methodology and the findings, there are policy cycles - and even cycles within cycles - with opportunities to influence the direction and development of policy. The original establishment of a group in 1987 (Lawrence, 1987; Powles et al 1992) and its location in a university setting mirrors what has happened in 2009 with the establishment of the Alliance. The Food Alliance is ideally placed to become an organization that creates the new tipping point of ideas (Gladwell, 2002) and questions related to food policy but learning from the lessons of the 1987-1992 period it needs to seek funding from a range of sources to provide a stable base for its operations. This provides a safety base to weather changes in politics as was seen in the period 1987-1992 and the early part of the the 21st century when changes in government resulted in a loss of funding for food policy activities.

Lessons learned from the analysis of the activities of the Food Alliance resonate with Morgan's (2009, p 342) two key points about the 'new food equation' and the challenges for the 'food planning community'. The new food equation brings together a set of disparate partners and communities, and the areas of overlap and on which they can agree or reach a consensus are few, but nonetheless there. This was demonstrated in the

development of the three agreed areas of activity (1) resilient fruit and vegetable supply, (2) public sector procurement and (3) development of healthy and sustainable food policy. Issues on which it might be possible to reach consensus in future include the management of peri-urban agricultural areas and the promotion of urban and metropolitan food economies by supporting local food systems. In terms of food planning, the actors are not homogenous and operate at different levels from the local to the federal. As the Food Alliance developed, it became apparent that it needed to operate at multiple levels of government, that the local arena can provide opportunities to influence state food policy and that the state policy arena can, in turn, provide opportunities to influence federal policy. The Food Alliance has needed to be flexible and opportunistic to take advantage of changing circumstances and political fortunes, and has developed into a food systems catalyst and facilitator, seeding ideas and projects and nurturing relationships within the diverse, multi-dimensional 'food planning community' (Morgan, 2009).

Others wishing to follow a similar path should consider that one of the first steps is to identify existing work on food and not re-create such work. The second is that alliances can be built around certain topics or areas of interest such as children's health, procurement etc. and campaigns developed to deliver on these. The area of food policy needs an organisation to advocate that is not bogged down in everyday delivery of services or food projects. Also consider a range of sources of funding so that the work is not dependent on one income stream.

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KMcC & RC are employees of the Food Alliance.

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