

# Australia says linking sausages to tobacco risk 'a farce'

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One of the world's top meat exporters Australia Tuesday ridiculed a landmark UN report linking sausages and ham to cancer, saying it was "a farce" to suggest they could be as lethal as cigarettes.

The World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) analysed 800 studies from around the world and found that [processed meats such as sausages, ham, and hot dogs cause bowel cancer](#), and red [meat](#) "probably" does too.

It placed processed meat into its Group 1 category of carcinogens. Other substances in the group include alcohol, asbestos and tobacco.

"No, it shouldn't be compared to cigarettes and obviously that makes the whole thing a farce—comparing sausages to cigarettes," Australian Agriculture Minister Barnaby Joyce told national radio.

"I don't think that we should get too excited that if you have a sausage you're going to die of [bowel cancer](#) because you're not. You just don't want to live on sausages."

The Australian meat industry's research and development corporation, Meat and Livestock Australia, said "promoting red meat as part of a healthy, balanced diet is important".

"Red meat such as beef and lamb is a critical, natural source of iron and zinc, vitamin B12 and omega-3—essential nutrients needed to keep the

body and brain functioning well," it said in a statement.

Australians are among the biggest consumers of meat in the world. They also have the eighth highest incidence of colorectal [cancer](#) globally, according to the World Cancer Research Fund.

Cancer Council Australia estimates that red and processed meats are associated with around one in six bowel cancers diagnosed in the country.

## **Back to a cave**

Meat producers elsewhere were also sceptical of the report with the North American Meat Institute (NAMI) saying IARC "tortured the data to ensure a specific outcome".

NAMI vice president Betsy Booren pointed to the high consumption of [processed meats](#) as part of the Mediterranean diet, yet "people in countries where the Mediterranean diet is followed, like Spain, Italy and France, have some of the longest lifespans in the world and excellent health".

In Hong Kong, where bowel cancer is the number two top-killing tumour, the food industry blasted the findings as "too rash" saying they failed to specify what kind of preservatives and additives in processed meat are carcinogenic.

"They should explain if some processed food does not contain these kinds of additives, the risk of causing cancer would be lower," Simon Wong Ka-wo, chairman of the Chamber of Food and Beverage Industry, told the South China Morning Post.

Australia's Joyce said "the biggest thing is to make sure you get a

balanced diet" as it was impossible for humans to avoid every cancer causing toxin in modern day life.

"If you got everything that the World Health Organization said was carcinogenic and took it out of your daily requirements, well you are kind of heading back to a cave," he said.

"If you're going to avoid everything that has any correlation with cancer whatsoever—don't walk outside, don't walk down the streets in Sydney, there's going to be very little in life that you do in the end."

The IARC evaluation revealed "strong mechanistic evidence supporting a carcinogenic effect" for [red meat](#) consumption—mainly for cancer of the colon and rectum, but also the pancreas and prostate, said the agency based in Lyon, France.

As for processed meat, including [hot dogs](#), sausages, corned beef, dried meat like beef jerky or South African biltong, canned meat or meat-based sauces, there was "sufficient evidence in humans that the consumption of processed meat causes colorectal cancer."

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