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Australian Olive oil quality and exports high

The international olive industry is closer to implementing regulations that will support fair exports and consumers' interest following a hot topic session coordinated by the Australian Olive Association at the American Oil Chemists' Society (AOCS) Annual Meeting held in Seattle USA, in May.

Paul Miller, President of the Australian Olive Association (AOA), was invited by the AOCS, to present a session on *Regional approaches to extra virgin olive oil quality*, which included nine speakers from Europe, Argentina, the USA, Canada and Australia.

He said that Australia, which is currently the largest consumer of olive oil per capita outside the Mediterranean, is seen as a technical leader of new olive oil producers due to its modern technical and scientific approach to agriculture.

"Our olive oil industry is involved directly in issues of regulation and quality definition whereas, in the EU countries, there is a disconnection between the producers, the scientists and regulators. Our integrated approach helps us find ways to better authenticate olive oil and describe its quality and to overcome problems with dysfunctional European standards," he said.

Australia's production of extra virgin olive oil represents 2-3% of the world's extra virgin

production and at least 5% of the world's high quality extra virgin olive oil. Australian production is also expected to rise from 14 million litres in 2008 to 27 million litres by 2014.

Mr Miller said that one of the issues discussed at the international meeting was the difficulty many countries, including Australia, have with existing EU standards and the Codex Alimentarius Standard.

"These standards have been used to restrict trade as they apply restrictive levels on some minor components of olive oils that many oils don't meet. At the same time, the standards do not adequately detect the blending of refined olive oil with extra virgin olive oil. Because of this, consumers are disadvantaged when they buy imported extra virgin olive oil believing it to be the best when, in fact, there may be quite a bit of second grade oil in the bottle.

"The Seattle meeting put the matter of true olive oil quality from new producing countries firmly on the global agenda and should help protect trade of Australian olive oils into the USA and Canada and, in the longer term, in other countries," said Mr Miller.

The value of Australian extra virgin olive oil exports rose from \$1.2 million in 2002 to \$12.3 million in 2007, with a positive outlook for the future partly due to the increase in production.