

Phosphorus scarcity takes centre stage

A looming peak in phosphorus production for fertiliser has gone relatively unnoticed said organisers of an international summit in Sydney last week.



Credit: [Pietro Fabeni](#)

The [3rd Sustainable Phosphorus Summit](#) held at the University of Technology Sydney highlighted the growing interest in long-term phosphorus security sparked by an 800 per cent price spike in phosphate commodities in 2008.

‘It is expected that global supplies of concentrated high-grade phosphate rock may run out in the next 100 years under current usage patterns,’ said Professor Stuart White, Director of the UTS [Institute for Sustainable Futures](#) (ISF), which hosted the summit.

According to Professor White, shortages of phosphorous, a major plant nutrient, have the potential ‘to generate significant price increases, particularly as reserves occur in a relatively small number of countries, notably China and Morocco.

‘This has serious implications for the world's ability to feed itself as population increases – the human body needs phosphorus to function, which it gets from food. Much of what we eat, in turn, comes from the phosphorus in soils that enables crops to grow.

‘Yet the public remains largely unaware of the potential threat, underscored by a lack of political action on the issue across the globe,’ he said.

The summit's 'keynote interview' featured Professor Paul Crutzen, who won a Nobel Prize for chemistry in 1995 for his

work on ozone depletion.

Summit participants established a National Strategic Phosphorus Advisory Group whose members include noted nutritionist Rosemary Stanton and representatives from the CSIRO, the Federal Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, the Fertiliser Industry Federation of Australia, Geoscience Australia and the Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists.

According to Dr Dana Cordell, ISF researcher and co-founder of the Global Phosphorus Research Initiative, another outcome of the summit has been the Blueprint for Global Phosphorus Security, a landmark document that will form the basis for further research and policy action to secure phosphorus supplies in Australia and globally.

Source: UTS

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