

Environment and Planning Standing Committee – Legislative Council Parliament House, Spring Street EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Dear Committee members

Submission to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into the Health Impacts of Air Pollution

I write in support of the call to phase out wood burning in residential areas.

We live in a high density area in inner city Melbourne, and for 6-7 months a year we are subjected to dense burning wood smoke coming from properties behind our residence and right next door. The smell is so strong we can smell it in our back open plan living area. Last July my son went out to play basketball in our back yard and was so overcome by smoke found it hard to breath and had to stop and come back inside.

He suffers from Asthma and the wood smoke plays havoc with his breathing and causes him to cough. I have tried talking to our neighbours but to no avail as they state that they are legally able to burn their wood fires. This has led to frustration and anger. I have also called the council reading this and was told that nothing can be done.

Wood smoke is toxic and with our high density living, been legally able to continue to burn wood is astounding. It has effected your family life, our air quality and our health !

Thank you

I call on the Inquiry to recommend phasing out of wood burning in residential areas for the following reasons:

- Wood heater smoke is a major source of air pollution: [2006 Port Phillip region data](#) shows air pollution from human sources consists of 32% wood heater smoke, 28% vehicles and 22% industry.
- Only [about 10 percent](#) of people use wood heaters, but they affect the health of other 90 percent who don't.
- The damaging health impacts of particle pollution (PM2.5) from wood smoke are [significant](#) and [well known](#) including that for [every new modern](#) wood heater per hectare there is a 7% increase that a child under 3 years will end up in emergency; the health costs of wood heater smoke *in Victoria alone* is [estimated as \\$8 billion](#) over the next decade. Australia-wide the estimated cost is [\\$3.4 billion per year](#) or \$4000- \$5600 per wood heater per year.
- People on low incomes are most at risk as they are [more likely](#) to have health conditions and live in areas with higher numbers of wood heaters/wood burning. Children are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of smoke.
- The Victorian Auditor General [report](#) 2018 found that EPA's limited air quality monitoring is misrepresenting air pollution levels in Victoria including failing to detect localised air pollution impacting residential areas.
- Studies [have shown](#) that wood heater standards do not reduce emissions. In real life wood heaters produce far [higher emissions](#) - individuals can burn damp or painted wood and allow heaters to smolder overnight.
- Local council responses to wood smoke have proven to be ineffective. Wood heater/fireplace use often occurs in evening or weekends when council officers are unavailable. The burden of monitoring smoke levels falls on neighbouring residents, often resulting in conflict and disputes, and little to no reduction in smoke levels.
- Burning wood contributes to [speeding up global warming](#) and climate change.
- The public are uninformed about the health harms, resulting in increasing numbers of heaters

being installed.

I ask that the Inquiry recommend the following:

1. **No new wood heaters:** Legislation to prevent wood heaters/fireplaces being installed and remove existing wood heaters/fireplaces upon the sale of a house. This costs the taxpayer nothing and helps to clear our air.
2. **Replacement scheme:** Introduce a scheme to phase out existing wood heaters/fireplaces and ensure they are replaced with sustainably sourced electric heating (cost efficient heat pumps), with the help of a rebate scheme.

Support the above with a widespread public education campaign - about the risk to health posed by wood smoke.

Sincerely

Samantha Esposito

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