



ACT
Government

Environment and
Sustainable Development



Committee Secretariat
Standing Committee on Community Affairs Reference Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretariat

Re: Inquiry into the impacts on health of air quality in Australia

Thank you for the invitation to make a submission to the above inquiry being conducted by the Standing Committee on Community Affairs.

The ACT Government has been undertaking ambient air quality monitoring in Canberra since the early 1990's. The Health Directorate is responsible for the Government's ambient air quality monitoring network with the Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate (ESDD) are responsible for annual reporting under the National Environment Protection (Ambient Air Quality) Measure (AAQ NEPM).

Historical monitoring indicates that the only AAQ NEPM pollutant of concern in the Canberra airshed is particulate matter, which increases during winter because of emissions from domestic wood heaters. In more recent years high concentrations of the particulate matter have also been attributed to dust storms and smoke from controlled burns.

I don't have any specific comments on the effects of particle matter as its health effects, especially fine particles, is well documented. Similarly, I don't have any specific comments on those populations most at risk as it is well understood that people with heart or lung diseases, children and the elderly are the most likely to be affected by exposure to particle pollution.

There was strong support from the AAQ NEPM review report to have a PM_{2.5} compliance standard in place of the current advisory reporting standard. This support is based on better understanding of the health effects of PM_{2.5} and sufficient data collected by all jurisdictions since the introduction of the current advisory reporting standard.

Nonetheless, the ACT Government acknowledges that there is no threshold for particulate pollution at which health effects do not occur and is working towards addressing the issue in an informed and measured manner to ensure a satisfactory outcome for all Canberrans.

ESDD has an integrated program to address woodsmoke, which is the largest source of particulate pollution in Canberra. This involves public education and enforcement activities, the licensing of firewood merchants, implementation of the 'Don't Burn Tonight Campaign' and the on-going implementation of the Wood Heater Replacement Program. All of which have seen a significant reduction in our particle pollution.

In addition to this, the ACT Government supports the prohibition on wood heaters in new development areas where planning studies show that they would have an adverse impact on air quality. These prohibitions have already been introduced in Dunlop, East O'Malley and the Molonglo Valley, excluding Wright.

The ACT continues to work with the Commonwealth and other jurisdictions at a national level through the Standing Council on Water and the Environment to progress actions to improve air quality, in particular national reforms to manage wood heater emissions.

Should you have any questions on the contents of the submission or require any further information please contact David Power

Yours sincerely

Daniel Walters
Director of Environment Protection and Water Regulation

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