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Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Submission on the impacts on health of air quality in Australia

1. **Wood smoke from solid-fuel heaters** creates air pollution with significant health ramifications and financial costs. The annual health costs for wood-heater emissions in the ACT are estimated to be \$56 million, or \$8306 per wood heater per year. A media release from ACT Environment Minister Simon Corbell states that "smoke from domestic wood heaters remains the largest source of air pollution in Canberra" (May 16, 2012).
2. The 2011 AECOM report "Economic Appraisal of Wood Smoke Control Measures" prepared for the NSW government examines a range of approaches to reduce fine-particle emissions and volatile organic compounds produced from wood heaters, with health savings to the year 2030 projected to be in the billions of dollars.
3. The adverse health effects include increased mortality, particularly from respiratory and cardiovascular diseases; inflammation of lungs; increased bronchitis, asthma and other symptoms, eg cough; and increased medication use and hospitalisation. The volatile organic compounds include known and probable human carcinogens, thus increasing cancer rates.
4. Significantly, only a small proportion (3 per cent) of Canberra households uses solid-fuel domestic burning, but is responsible for about a 70 per cent of the particulates and a similar proportion of volatile organic compounds.

It is apparent that the wood supply lobby has an undue influence on public health policy and practice.

The National Pollutant Inventory states that 71 per cent of Canberra's PM10 particulate pollution comes from solid fuel domestic burning (10 per cent from motor vehicles), and 66 per cent of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons come from solid fuel domestic burning (30 per cent from motor vehicles).

5. The ACT government's support of education initiatives ("Burn right tonight") and the wood-heater replacement program, while useful, is nowhere near enough to get to grips with the problem. For NSW, the AECOM report found that the option with the highest benefit is the phase-out of wood heaters at the time of sale of a property. The ban on new wood-heater sales has the second

highest benefit.

6. The following **case study** is relevant to the term of reference concerning “the standards, monitoring and regulation of air quality at all levels of government”. The legislation applying to **backyard BBQ cooking in the ACT** is very weak indeed. In spite of the known health risks associated with particulates, a good deal of smoke is still allowed for cooking purposes, which can easily affect neighbouring properties, as it has in my case. The contradictions and difficulty of applying are readily apparent in the advice I received to various questions put to an ACT Environment Protection officer:

Q How long can the wood fire under the BBQ be smoking before they actually put anything on the grill?

A If they are having a BBQ or using it as heating and if there are signs of the occupants in the process of having a BBQ and waiting for the fire to die down before cooking any smoke coming from the BBQ is exempt.

If they are using the BBQ to burn wood and there are no signs of a BBQ or the fire being used for heating then this activity is not exempt and please call Canberra Connect.

Q What if they cook something, then leave it smoking for another quarter of an hour, then cook something else?

A If they having a BBQ or in the process of having a BBQ any smoke coming from the BBQ is exempt.

Q If they add another log of wood, what you told me suggests they could then have another 20 mins of smoke time.

A If they have a wood fire and it has a chimney every time they put on a piece of wood on the fire it is allowed to smoke for 20min.

If they are using the BBQ or the fire is contained and using it for heating any smoke coming from this fire is exempt.

Q How can I accurately monitor what is going on, other than standing on the sidelines of their BBQ?

A By observing what they are doing,
They will be either having a BBQ or heating themselves and if the fire is contained any smoke coming from the fire is exempt.
If they are just burning off and not using it for heating or cooking this activity is not exempt please call Canberra Connect.