

ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION AUTHORITY BOARD

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Our Ref: 11.13.13/JAR/HDS

7 July 2010

Mr Clive Stott
9 Alpine Crescent
Grindelwald
Tasmania 7277

Dear Mr Stott,

LETTER TO EPA BOARD - SMOKE INHALATION

I refer to your letter dated 3 June 2010 in which you expressed your concerns in relation to the health effects of forest industry planned burning activities. You mentioned that these activities have resulted in elevated levels of harmful wood smoke and that they in turn have resulted in you experiencing poor health. In particular you referred to the specific symptoms you experienced on 22 April 2010.

Whilst I am not qualified to comment on the specific health matters raised in your letter, I share your public health concerns and those of the wider community in relation to the health impacts of smoke from planned burns. The Environment Protection Authority (EPA) acknowledges that planned burning is a significant environmental issue for the community and is committed to minimising the impacts on the community of smoke from this source.

The EPA's approach to the issue of smoke from planned burns is guided by the principles of the *Environment Protection Policy (Air Quality) 2004* and the objectives of the *Tasmanian Air Quality Strategy 2006*. In short, the EPA's aim is to ensure that smoke from all types of planned burns is managed in accordance with best practice and that smoke is reduced to the lowest practicable level consistent with the need to conduct burns.

As you are aware the EPA does not directly regulate planned burning but it is working with the Forest Practices Authority (FPA) on a strategy to improve smoke management in relation to burns conducted by the forestry industry and by the Parks and Wildlife Service. The strategy, referred to as the *Coordinated Smoke Management Strategy (CSMS)*, is an initiative of the FPA and is in the second year of its operation. It provides for the coordination of planned burns to minimise the risk of high smoke levels in individual airsheds and imposes restrictions to limit the number and size of burns on days when weather forecasts and modelling predict poor smoke dispersal.

The EPA and the FPA will review the strategy and explore opportunities to further reduce the impact of smoke from planned forestry industry burns. It is intended that this review will focus on how the CSMS was used and how it and other tools can be improved to reduce the likelihood of incidents involving elevated smoke levels. It will include input from the EPA's air quality specialists and will be informed by the air quality monitoring information collected by the BLANKET (*Base-Line-Air-Network-EPA-Tasmania*) smoke monitoring network and by other monitoring stations operated by the EPA.

I believe that the approach adopted in the CSMS to limiting the amount of fuel burnt in an area on any one day, taking into account prevailing weather conditions, is a sensible and logical one to minimise the effects of smoke. However, having now trialled the system for two years, I would like to see it become a more formal and mandatory part of the structure to manage planned burns. The system has been a ground-breaking one, and as such, I think that there is still considerable room for improvement and refinement, including modification of the system to take account of the ambient levels of smoke at the beginning of each day where this data is available.

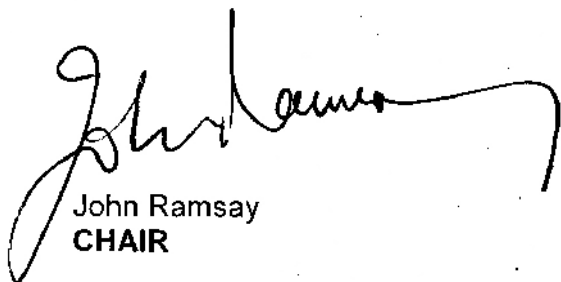
Balancing the commercial, environmental and public safety objectives of the various types of planned burning activities against the need to avoid unacceptable smoke impacts on local communities is a complex policy area for Government. Therefore, I believe that it is time for a more comprehensive review of how planned burning is undertaken and regulated, particularly with reference to its costs in terms of smoke and the subsequent risks to health.

The smoke monitoring station at Exeter is the BLANKET station closest to your residence at Grindelwald. Data collected from this station during April 2010 shows that for most of the month the day averaged PM2.5 levels were less than $2 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, signifying clean air. However, beginning about 17 April there was a period of elevated PM2.5 levels lasting for about six days. During this period the day averaged PM2.5 levels peaked at $16 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ on the 19 April. Similar observations were recorded over this interval at other BLANKET stations in the north of the state. The similarity of the features in the real-time measurements at these stations indicates that it is unlikely that the source of the elevated PM2.5 levels was smoke from domestic wood heaters. The source was more likely to have been smoke from one or more large fires.

A preliminary investigation of the air quality measurements recorded at the Carrick and Exeter BLANKET stations during April indicates that smoke levels (average daily PM 2.5 concentrations) did not exceed the National Advisory Reporting Standard of $25 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$. A full analysis of the air quality data for the 2010 autumn planned burn season is underway and a report on this work will be published on the EPA Division website in due course.

Please contact Bob Hyde (Air Specialist) in the EPA Division on the number at the head of this letter if you wish to discuss these matters further.

Yours sincerely



John Ramsay
CHAIR