

THE JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON ETHICAL CONDUCT MET IN THE CONFERENCE ROOM, HENTY HOUSE, LAUNCESTON, ON FRIDAY 7 NOVEMBER 2008.

Mr CLIVE STOTT WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

CHAIR (Mr Wilkinson) - Thank you, Clive, for coming in. I will leave it to you to speak to your submission and then we will ask you some questions.

Mr STOTT - There is one alteration I would like to make to my submission. On page 2, the second last paragraph, I would like to delete the word 'environment'. I have some other documents I would like to tender in relation to my submission. As I mentioned in the submission, I wasn't going to provide everything at that point in time. Do you want those tendered separately or as we go along? I have done a copy for you people.

CHAIR - You can tender them all now.

Mr STOTT - Firstly, I would like to go to one of the last points in my written submission concerning children with asthma, and then move on to deaths in our community as a result of planned-burn smoke in this State.

As someone who worked for Health in this State for approximately 15 years in charge of engineering and biomedical engineering and, in addition, looked after respiratory patients in the north-east of Tasmania with oxygen equipment, I find this quite sickening. I have in front of me a letter I which I have just tabled to the committee. It is a letter I wrote to a Mr Peter Rowlands, the Mersey district forest manager and is dated 12 June 2008. It says:

'Dear Sir

Planned-burn smoke

This is to confirm yesterday's meeting at home with my wife, Annette, and your Mr Bob Knox, coordinator of works, and Miss Jane Becker, community liaison officer at Forestry Tasmania, Mersey division.

Whilst the two-and-a-half hour meeting was mostly taken up promoting Forestry Tasmania burning practices that create huge amounts of smoke for people to breathe, it was also acknowledged by Mr Knox that seeds will germinate well without burning. It was acknowledged that smoke intensity across Tasmania had increased in the last couple of years.

I raised the point that lengthening the burn season will not lessen the health impact on people exposed to smoke. In actual fact they would end up inhaling more over the extended period because they would not be able to see it or smell it but their lungs would still feel it.

I made it clear that the effects of breathing this smoke did not just go away for most people when the smoke stops. It causes lasting damage that needs costly special treatment, and it can even result in death.

However, not lessening the importance of those above facts, what was of major concern to me was the fact that Forestry Tasmania admits to having to refer children affected by planned-burn smoke to the Asthma Foundation for management of their condition. To put these children into deliberately-induced asthma episodes and then to offer to support them with their treatment, in conjunction with the Asthma Foundation, so that Forestry can continue to create more damaging smoke, I believe is simply unforgivable.'

It is not only children. You people are probably aware of what happened to me. I was at home with asthma and I was quite well until the burn season started. I tried to manage my condition at home because I have all the gear I need and the hospital people know me. Two weeks later I ended up in Accident and Emergency seriously ill. To cut the story short, I ended up in A&E four times with clots in the calf, clots in the back of the knee, clots in the groin, clots going through my heart into both lungs and DVT in the leg - a very serious matter. Because they know me in A and E and because they were short of beds they started me on blood thinners, which I'll be on for the rest of my life, and we're still having trouble trying to stabilise those. That is lifelong and it's still life threatening for me because once you clot your body wants to clot.

That's as a direct result of those planned burns, which is what the senior medical officer from the environmental health department who read my reports with the hospital decided. There were elevated breathings of smoke particles in my vicinity and at the recording stations at the time of those attacks, which confirms what has happened.

CHAIR - Have the doctors confirmed that as well?

Mr STOTT - My doctor agrees with me. There is a person at Patersonia whom I was going to mention later, who has bought a kombivan to head out when the smoke gets that bad - I will mention the person's name because she's approved that I can - Angelika Allen at Patersonia. Her doctor has stated that her asthma condition is caused by smoke pollution from forestry burns during that period. She has to leave her home in middle of the night sometimes, drive 100 kilometres around trying to find somewhere where there's no smoke and it's been impossible for her to find anywhere; she has to leave her husband, family, animals and everything at home, to be able to live.

That's simply what it was with me; trying to survive, sitting in a chair for months, trying to breathe on oxygen support and trying to get to the doctor and even having to cancel medical appointments with specialists and doctors. Sadly, my wife was having radiation treatment at that time and I could not get out of the chair to even drive her in for the last part of that radiation when she really needed me. All I could do was sit in the chair and cry; 59 years old.

I didn't know where to write, who to contact - in the first instance I wrote to Jodie Campbell, however, that letter has been passed on to nearly everybody that I know within Federal and State government and I've had very little feedback from it, quite frankly, but I've tabled that letter this morning for you to read.

Mr BEST - What was the date of that one?

Mr STOTT - The date of that one was 21 April, a letter from me to Jodie Campbell.

Mr BEST - Okay, thank you. He's carbon copied it, I think.

CHAIR - Yes, so, you've put in the complaints to the relevant bodies?

Mr STOTT - I have. It's very difficult; who do you ring? Who do you contact? I have produced a web site and in doing a lot of work for that I have found out there are two 1800 numbers to call; one is the environment department and one is environment health. As smoke increased and as it made me sick, whether I came to Launceston or was at Grindelwald, I would ring those people and lodge a complaint.

CHAIR - As you probably know, this committee can look at what you've just stated, but it's not here to investigate it and then report, as you probably understand -

Mr STOTT - Yes.

CHAIR - It's here to say, look, should there be a body set up to look at ethics and integrity, et cetera of members of parliament -

Mr STOTT - Well, the point about that is - and I'm coming to this just down the track - there is no body that is purely responsible for smoke in Tasmania. I will digress at this point and will just change things around a bit from I what I had planned. There are a lot of acts. In actual fact I tendered that again today - standard codes and acts. These are just ones that I have been involved with. It is not complete by any means. I will show it to the committee. It goes across lots of different government departments and to even get to speak to ministers about it is impossible. That is another thing: I believe that ministers are guarded by people within their departments so that you cannot get to speak to them. I have tried for so long to speak to Michelle O'Byrne for a 10-minute talk, just 15 minutes away. I have been denied time and time again. I will give you facts and evidence on that in a minute.

We are talking about all these acts. We are talking about Forestry. We are talking about Parks and Wildlife. We are talking about local councils, we are talking about lots of different government departments and it is not pulled together anywhere. Smoke is being emitted by all of them at random and all these talks of 'it is going to be fixed this year' - I left Scottsdale almost 11 years ago because of this same problem, and it is now worse. I bought above the smoke line and my condition has become worse and worse, not through age. I have been quite healthy until this all started. We look at the number of acts in that - there are probably 20 if you pick up the ones that I have missed all cutting across different departments, and nobody really has control. What I have suggested in my submission is that one department, Environmental Health, be put in charge of this. I have had dealings with their senior medical officers and Dr Roscoe Taylor on this.

Mr BEST - What did he say? What was his opinion?

Mr STOTT - He has put himself onto the FPA - Forest Practices Association - but I do not really believe he has any power because he is not a board member. That is about the best we have done so far. This is my personal opinion and it is the opinion of other air groups that are emerging across the north of the State as a result of people's worsening medical conditions. There is quite a consensus that, because it is an environmental issue and it is a health issue, that it should go under the Environmental Health department.

Mr BEST - I have not done any real research in this area so excuse my ignorance.

Mr STOTT - That is fine.

Mr BEST - What happens interstate? Is there anything that you are aware of interstate with regards to how it might be controlled? Or it is an area that no-one has really concentrated on, or anywhere else for that matter?

Mr STOTT - All I can say in answer to that is to have a look on my web site.

Mr BEST - What is your web site, sorry?

Mr STOTT - The web site is www.cleanairtas.com. That is in my submission.

Mr BEST - I see. It is all in there.

Mr STOTT - I make reference to it. The links and nearly all of the letters that I am referring to today have been posted on the correspondence page for you to read. Going back to your question with regards to what happens interstate, I have had enough trouble, quite honestly, with my health and time available to try to handle this at a local level. I do not know -

Mr HALL - I appreciate your problems and you did mention that National Parks obviously have to do fuel reduction burns and the Emergency Services do, the Fire Service does, farmers do and then of course you have wild bushfires on top of that. How did you go when the Tippogoree Hills were alight there a couple of years ago? That produced an enormous amount of smoke and something beyond control. That is just the point I am making, sometimes you cannot control some of these things, can you?

Mr STOTT - Can I just correct what you have just said? You are saying that Parks, Wildlife, Forestry, councils and all these people have to do planned burns for fuel reduction. They do not. They actually do not have to burn. This is the sad part about all of this. People are getting sicker and sicker with all this smoke. I put in a submission that was cabled today to the Chief Forest Practices Officer of the Forest Practices Authority, and there it is. I will just show you. There is a doctor tied up with the Armidale Air Quality Group, Dr Dorothy L. Robson, and I will just read what she said. This is a letter dated 17 September to me.

'Hi Clive. I thought of you when I read this and it is all about a biomass power station in Western Australia where they are not burning as such, they are burning it under controlled conditions producing power and there is no smoke being released into the community.'

There are other ways they can use air burn curtains which are like a shipping container that has fire in it with forced air across it. There is a loader dropping full logs into it and the only time that a whiff of smoke comes out into the community is as that log drops into it and it breaks the air curtain. That is one method - all explained. Then there are what we call masticators. There it is. You might think, 'They can't do what a fire can do'. They can do it better and they can do it without smoke.

This is nothing new, it has all been tried overseas and working successfully. We do not have to reinvent the wheel.

Mr HALL - But what about the wildfire situation? Some of those things you just cannot -

Mr STOTT - Do we have wildfires in Tasmania? This term has been spread quite wrongly throughout Tasmania. We do not have wildfires. We have bushfires in Tasmania. Wildfires are normally caused in countries where they have fires in these big plantations that we are developing in Tasmania now. We will have wildfires if we keep going in this direction and do not employ these methods to -

Mr HALL - We will go back and say 'bushfires' then.

Mr STOTT - Bushfires - you cannot fully control bushfires but you can make fire breaks using these methods that I have produced which will reduce the impact of bushfires, exactly the same as they go out now and they burn fire breaks. We do not have to burn. It is just something that has evolved which was the easy way, it was the cheap way. They said the Aborigines burnt. Goodness me, surely our forestry industry has progressed past that over all these years. We do not have to burn. We have come up with modern methods and there is pyrolysis which will develop byproducts and can produce power and that sort of thing.

So with these methods we do not have to burn. I am convinced that we do not have to burn.

CHAIR - Are you saying, Clive, that there has to be a body in place to listen to people who wish to complain, or otherwise, about the burns?

Mr STOTT - Yes.

CHAIR - And you're saying that body should be who?

Mr STOTT - One body. If you read the correspondence on my web site you'll see how, when I write to somebody they say it's somebody else's jurisdiction, and it goes round and round. Then they say that they don't have any regulatory control.

CHAIR - If I can, because we started a bit late yet we're trying to keep it to time, if we can.

Mr STOTT - Yes, sure. One body -

CHAIR - And how is that body to be made up?

Mr STOTT - I believe that that one body to do with smoke should be handled by environmental health.

Mr BEST - So Roscoe Taylor, or something like that.

Mr STOTT - And his officers under him. People that are qualified in the health effects of smoke. At present, who's controlling this? It's the FPA and the EPA that are at arm's length from the Government. They're not even responsible to the Government. The FPA mainly consists of people with a forestry background, so they've been brought up thinking this way and they have an interest in forestry only, not smoke. Tas Fire Service is interested in -

CHAIR - I hear what you say. You're saying that it should be a Roscoe Taylor and environmental health people. Roscoe is the person you believe should be in charge of that body, and if there is a complaint your complaint should be filtered through to Roscoe and his group, and they should be able to act as a result of that complaint.

Mr STOTT - Correct. Can I just expand one little point. Tas Fire Service has come up now and said that their responsibility is only for protecting assets and stopping fire spreading. They are quite happy to go and do clean burns but they're not interested in smoke. I am, people are.

Mr BEST - Can I get a copy of that letter that you sent?

Mr STOTT - Yes, I have made them all available.

Mr BEST - Oh, thank you.

Mr MARTIN - Basically, what you're saying is there needs to be a whole-of-government approach channelled into one body in relation to burning in general.

Mr STOTT - Yes, and so that the public know where they have to go to. At present it's fragmented, there is not one body you can go to where you know that that will be recorded and that that body has powers to investigate and prosecute.

CHAIR - Thanks, Clive. I understand what you're saying. Did you want to sum up very quickly?

Mr STOTT - Yes. There's one small point that I haven't raised. Because some government departments aren't very interested in releasing information, I have had problems with Forestry Tasmania. I have had to put in a freedom of information request. They were put in months and months ago, in actual fact the first one on 8 June, and they are still not resolved. They are going through the Ombudsman to finally get the rest of the information.

Not only that, despite what Forestry states,

'In keeping with Forestry Tasmania's commitment to release to the media all copies of responses to Freedom of Information requests, Forestry Tasmania has posted on its web site documents included in response to recent requests. The documents relate to a request from Mr Clive Stott.'

It hasn't even been posted properly, they posted ones that didn't even comply with my request.

CHAIR - There has been some evidence in relation to Freedom of Information and the slowness of the information.

Mr STOTT - Can I just actually add to that. Following up on that, a gentleman the other day rang up the Ombudsman and said, 'What's happened? We're a long time over the 30 days with what's happening'. They cannot cope because there is so much restriction on these major government departments in providing this information that the Ombudsman is absolutely overloaded and always asking for extra time. It is a major problem, not just with Forestry Tasmania but with lots of other things.

The last point I would like to raise is something that concerned me. I live at Grindelwald and I had this item I have tabled today put in my letterbox. It has a joint logo in place of a letterhead, the Tasmania Fire Service logo and the Tamar Ridge Estates logo. For those who are not aware, that is owned by Gunns. They have said that they want to burn next autumn right behind my property and I am objecting to it on smoke grounds. I don't believe they need to burn, they can use the other method that we have mentioned today. We live 10 minutes from the West Tamar Council's green waste station and if you drive down the West Tamar highway at present you will see some of it already stacked up that could be taken to the green waste station and chipped. It is being left there to burn - big log piles that won't dry out for probably several years. This concerns me because the fire service came to my house and I asked them where Gunns fitted into the process of this burn. They said that they have every right to enter our property and conduct these burns as they wish. Sorry, but I don't believe that Gunns has any right to enter our properties and conduct a burn under the guise of the Tasmanian Fire Service. Surely not?

CHAIR - I don't believe that would be correct. I think the information you were given was wrong.

Mr STOTT - There it is, there's the letter. I met with Ian Cawthorn, signatory of this, from the Tasmania Fire Service. He came to our place and I have witnesses to what he said.

Mr BEST - I don't doubt what you say. Can I have a look?

Mr STOTT - Sure, you can keep it.

CHAIR - Is that in the documents?

Mr STOTT - Yes.

CHAIR - Thank you very much for that evidence, Clive. Thanks for your time and your submission.

Mr STOTT - I appreciate the opportunity to come along and give my oral submission.

THE WITNESS WITHDREW.