

Minister for Environment, Parks, Heritage and the Arts
Minister for Sport and Recreation

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Name: Mr Clive Stott
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Dear Mr Stott

Thank you for your email of 22 April 2008 and the attached letter to Ms Jodie Campbell, Federal Member for Bass, regarding planned burning by the forestry industry.

The preferred approach of the Department of Environment, Parks, Heritage and the Arts to this issue is to ensure that planned burns are managed in accordance with best practice, and that smoke is reduced to the lowest practical level consistent with the need to conduct burns. Planned burning is conducted by the forestry industry, farmers and other parties for forest regeneration, waste disposal, fire hazard reduction and other purposes.

During the current burning season, the forestry industry is trialing a standard for management of planned burn smoke. The standard specifies a method of predicting planned burn smoke travel and dispersion. This standard will aid decision-making on whether a burn should proceed on a particular day, and provides for communication with persons that might be affected. The standard will be finalised after the trial and consideration given to an appropriate amendment to the Forest Practices Code 2000 to require compliance with the standard. My Department supports this trial and has contributed to the development of the standard.

The Environment Protection Policy (Air Quality) 2004 sets out general principles for planned burn smoke management, and the relevant authorities are obliged to incorporate the policy's provisions in their regulatory regimes in due course. My Department will seek to ensure that the policy's principles are reflected in the amendment to the Forest Practices Code. When the Code has been amended, best practice smoke management can be enforced through the forest practices regulatory system.

I am fully aware of public concerns about smoke impacts from planned burning by the forestry industry, particularly in regard to human health, and can assure you that my Department is working to improve the situation.

Yours sincerely

Michelle O'Byrne MP
Minister for Environment, Parks, Heritage and the Arts