



Australian Government
Department of Health and Aged Care

Ref No: MC23-000700

Mr Clive Stott
cleanair@cleanairtas.com

Dear Mr Stott

Thank you for your correspondence of 9 January 2023 to the Prime Minister, the Hon Anthony Albanese MP, on cultural burning and its impacts on air quality and human health. Your letter has been referred to the Minister for Health and Aged Care, the Hon Mark Butler MP. The Minister has asked me to reply.

The state and territory governments have primary responsibility for care and management of environment. This includes managing local air quality issues and bushfire prevention activities.

More information about bushfire management and national environment law can be found on the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water website at www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/epbc/publications/factsheet-bushfire-management-and-national-environment-law. At a national level the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, together with states and territories, also help to maintain and improve Australia's air quality more broadly through delivering actions under the National Clean Air Agreement and air quality standards. More information on air quality in Australia is available at <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/protection/air-quality>.

Cultural Burning, which involves the intentional burning of land by First Nations people for ecological and cultural purposes, has been practiced for thousands of years by many First Nations communities across Australia. The health impacts of cultural burning are complex and multifaceted, and can be both positive and negative.

Positive health impacts of cultural burning can include improved air and water quality, increased access to traditional foods and medicines, and improved mental and emotional well-being through cultural reclamation and connection to the land. Cultural burning can also help prevent the spread of wildfires and reduce the risk of catastrophic fires that can have devastating impacts on human health and well-being.

However, cultural burning can also have negative health impacts, particularly if it is not carried out safely and with appropriate precautions. To protect the health of people from the negative health impacts of cultural burning, appropriate resources and training should be provided to ensure that burning is carried out safely and with appropriate precautions.

Further information on cultural burning in Tasmania is available here:
<https://www.aboriginalheritage.tas.gov.au/Documents/AHT%20Fact%20Sheet%20-%20Cultural%20Burning.pdf>

For more local advice you may also wish to review the information on air quality available on the Tasmanian Department of Health website at www.health.tas.gov.au/health-topics/environmental-health/air-quality.

Thank you for writing on this matter.

Yours sincerely



Stephen Bouwhuis
Assistant Secretary
Environmental Health and Climate Change Branch
Department of Health and Aged Care
24 February 2023