

**SENATE COMMUNITY AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
INQUIRY INTO THE IMPACTS ON HEALTH
OF AIR QUALITY IN AUSTRALIA.**

**OPENING ADDRESS BY
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SECRETARY, TUGGERANONG COMMUNITY COUNCIL**

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Senators,

Thank you for giving the Tuggeranong Community Council an opportunity to present this morning.

Air quality is an issue that concerns and affects many Tuggeranong and Canberra residents.

First, let me paint you a picture.

Tuggeranong sits in a Valley to the south of Canberra and has a population of about 98,000.

Because of its topography and like many residential areas in the cooler climes of Australia, it suffers high to extremely high levels of air pollution every winter.

In fact the CSIRO identified Tuggeranong as one of the heaviest polluted residential areas in Australia, along with Launceston and ahead of some of our major capitals.

And the source of our air pollution problem is slow combustion wood heaters.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, just 2-point-3 per cent of households in Canberra burn wood as their primary source of domestic heating.

And, according to the Federal Environment Department, wood heating is responsible for 71 per cent of Canberra's particle air pollution.

This is compared to motor vehicles which are responsible for just 10-point-1-percent.

The ACT Government's own figures show that air pollution increases threefold in the Tuggeranong Valley in winter.

In 2011 Tuggeranong recorded four breaches of the national air pollution standard.

This is an improvement on past years.

Clearly we have a problem in our leafy suburbs where a minority of households are responsible for the majority of our air pollution.

Not only is residential wood smoke annoying and destroys the amenity of our neighbourhoods, it is a serious health issue.

As far back as 1985 a study by Honicky suggested that indoor heating with wood burning stoves was a significant factor in the occurrence of symptoms of respiratory illness among children.

This finding was supported by similar studies in 1989 by Butterfield, in 1994 by Larson and Koenig and in 1997 by Lipsett.

More recently, a study in Christchurch found people living in the smokiest suburbs of that city suffered 68 per cent more respiratory deaths and 22 per cent more circulatory deaths than those living in the cleanest suburbs.

And in Launceston, cutting wood heater use from 66 per cent to 30 per cent saw a 20 per cent reduction in cardiovascular related deaths in winter months and a 28 per cent reduction in respiratory deaths

The NSW Environment Department warns smoke from wood heaters is a major cause of air pollution.

It states on its website that during winter, even in Sydney's mild climate, where only a small proportion of households use wood heaters, those wood heaters can produce up to seven times as much particle pollution as cars.

It goes on to warn that wood smoke contains a number of noxious gases, some of which are toxic or carcinogenic, and fine particles which go deep into the lungs.

This is supported by studies that suggest it's more toxic than cigarette smoke.

Tests on bacteria and mice showed it produced 12 times as many mutations and tumours as the same amount of cigarette smoke.

Residential wood smoke pollution also adds to our health costs.

In Canberra it is estimated that each wood heater adds over \$8 thousands dollars to our annual health bill.

Senators, the Tuggeranong Community Council is not calling for wood heaters to be banned in Canberra nor does it want people to freeze in winter

It's seeking a new national emissions and efficiency standard for wood heaters, '

- one that is based on public health;
- one that is set independent of industry and,
- one that is coupled with a program to phase out old, non-compliant wood heaters.

It believes new national emissions and efficiency standards will mean a boon for the wood heating industry in Canberra through the sale of many new cleaner and more efficient wood heaters.

Householders can continue to heat their homes with wood, with new heaters that use less fuel, are cheaper to run and are better for our health.

Good Senators, we all know about the harmful affects of second hand cigarette smoke and so we have legislated to protect public health.

We have introduced tough regulations to reduce harmful air pollution from our cars, to make them more efficient and to clean up our cities.

To a large extent the car industry has co-operated and this has led to the development of new technologies.

This begs the question, if vehicles can be made cleaner and more efficient then why not wood heaters, especially if wood heaters and not vehicles are the major source of air pollution in Canberra and many other towns and cities across Australia.

I would now like to hand over to my colleague Rusty Woodward who wishes to make a brief personal statement.

ENDS