

**REVIEW OF THE NATIONAL ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION  
(AMBIENT AIR QUALITY) MEASURE  
AIR QUALITY STANDARDS DISCUSSION PAPER**

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The headings below have been extracted from the discussion paper. **Chapter 5: Issues to be considered in evaluation of NEPM standards** (page 140 of *AAQNEPM Review Air Quality Standards Discussion Paper*) provides further discussion on these questions.

#### **ISSUES TO BE CONSIDERED**

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**Q1. Is there sufficient new health evidence to support a revised standard and if so, for which pollutants?**

As far as I understand, after reading the Discussion Paper, and the one I am most concerned about is Particles, there is enough new health evidence to enforce stricter controls of this pollutant, and to make an effort to ban it altogether.

**Q2. Does the current approach, which allows for a number of exceedences of the standard, meet the requirement for adequate protection or are there alternative methods that could provide more consistency in the level of health protection associated with complying with the NEPM standards?**

As I understand it, exceedences are still pollution and harmful to human health and the environment, so why should they be tolerated? It seems to me that we either have a standard

that is adhered to, otherwise, what is the point in all this? It is a gross injustice to expect even one person to suffer the effects of pollution for any reason, whether it be economics or because it is "too hard".

Pollutants do not recognise state borders, and Tasmania's air quality has, on occasions, been compromised by forestry burning in Victoria. The problem with pollutants - smoke, dust, chemicals, weedicides, herbicides, fumes - is that once they are in the air they cannot be controlled and often travel long distances from where they originated. We need to remember that everything is connected, and what happens in one area, affects someone in another.

I have no suggestions re alternative methods, but I do think we need to look at how society and the economy is structured, because as it is now, without change in how we do things, there will be more and more pollutants released into the air in the name of "the economy". Economic gain should not cancel out people's entitlement to clean air and good health.

**Q3. Should changes be made to the reporting protocols that would lead to a greater transparency and better understanding of the causes of exceedences in jurisdictions, the potential risk to population health, and management approaches being undertaken to address these exceedences?**

Yes, because if the causes are hidden, the people most affected are unable to comment or have input in how to fix the problem. Transparency would also mean that hopefully there would be no more cover ups, so that people would know who was polluting, when, and hopefully, why. Money is no substitute for good health. Legislation alone will not solve the problem - it needs to be implemented hand in hand with positive action for change.

**Q4. Any other issues you wish to raise?**

Yes. There are three issues I would like to raise, and they are:

Land Management, Forestry Practices, and Public and Goods Transport. If we are serious about making the air and the environment safer for all of us, then we have to start changing how we do things, particularly in these areas.

**FORESTRY PRACTICES:** Here is Tasmania (and I suspect, in Victoria also), smoke is a problem from forestry controlled burns. In the event of a bush fire, initially the fire travels in the tree tops, rather than through the undergrowth, so the burning of the undergrowth won't stop bush fires and robs the trees of nutrients, destroys new growth and the homes of birds and animals. The end result of continual burning will be that the trees eventually die, the atmosphere polluted and people are made sick. We face the possibility of losing our forests if we continue to burn them.

The forests would never burn every year, if left alone, and the trees are compromised with slow or cool burns, because the buds under the bark are damaged. And how many of our bush fires are deliberately lit? This is a real social problem.

As for forestry burns making it safer for citizens, maybe we should rethink allowing people to live in the middle of the bush, putting themselves and others at risk when there are bush fires. Another strategy could be the planting of a buffer zone of low combustion trees, like European trees which have a higher water content and no volatile oils. This would help protect people living in the bush and make it unnecessary to keep burning our native forests.

Smoke is full of the particles which are mentioned in the Discussion Paper, and since I came back to Tasmania to live, I have developed asthma. I am not a smoker and never have been, but although we live in a semi rural area where we thought we would have clean air, the air, more often than not, is blue with the smoke of land owners burning, or forestry burns.

I believe we should be moving away from burning because it adds to climate change and affects the health of thousands of people, not to mention other life forms. Even trees can only tolerate so much pollution. As the Discussion Paper points out, fossil fuel burning is the cause of multiple pollutants and much ill health, so it makes sense to severely limit or ban it altogether.

LAND MANAGEMENT: All the green "waste" that is burnt, is nutrient that is lost to the soil. I believe we should be encouraging our farmers and other land owners to mulch and compost, rather than burn "waste".

In regards to dust, I know there has been a long drought in many places, causing dust problems, but where possible we should be investigating the planting of hedgerows because they would protect paddocks from wind, stabilise soil, help stop soil erosion and stabilise the water table, while also providing shelter for wildlife.

There have also been innovations in farming which do not require large scale ploughing of paddocks with the potential loss of top soil to the wind, so maybe such methods need to be investigated further, and farmers encouraged to change old, harmful practices.

PUBLIC AND GOODS TRANSPORT: Our roads are full of cars and trucks, and the number is rapidly increasing, which elevates pollutants and makes people sick. A comprehensive public transport system, and comprehensive goods and passenger rail services would help relieve this problem.

CONCLUSION: Whatever the scientific data, I know what the lack of clean air has done to me, and to my husband who was already a cardiac patient. The pollution has been so bad at times that I have almost had to call the ambulance for him.

As a nation, our greatest assets are our people and our environment, but if either of them is sick, then society does not function properly, therefore healthy people in a healthy environment should be our top priority, because only then will we have a truly strong economy.

Humans were on the earth for eons before economics were invented, so please, in all your discussions and decisions, remember the human cost of pollution, and do not put money before the health of the people, because no amount of money can bring back a person's health once it has been compromised, which makes pollution control and clean air a humanitarian issue at least as important as an economic one.