

Name of MLA

Address

Date

Dear [Title: Mr/Ms/Minister],

I write to encourage you to support and adopt all the recommendations outlined in the recent report into wood heaters by the ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, Dr Sophie Lewis. The report, *“Can Canberra ‘Burn Right Tonight’ or is there ‘no safe level of air pollution”*? was tabled in the ACT Legislative Assembly on 23 March by Minister for the Environment, Rebecca Vassarotti, and sets out an evidence-based, irrefutable case that wood heaters should be phased out to protect public health.

Noting that rural areas are excluded from the Commissioner’s recommendations, the report recommends:

#### **1. Phase out of wood heaters**

This includes setting a target date by which wood heaters will be replaced by clean electric alternatives, supported through accessible financial support for low-income households. Further, the installation of new wood heaters will be prohibited in new and existing builds and the removal of existing wood heaters will be mandated before an ACT property can be sold.

#### **2. Education about wood heater health risks**

This recommendation includes the introduction of mandatory labelling at the point of sale for wood heaters and firewood explaining the health risks caused by wood heaters. It also calls for explicit messaging about the health risks associated with wood heater usage in ACT Government education and communication activities (e.g. Burn Right Tonight program).

#### **3. Strengthen compliance**

The report calls for the ACT to develop and apply empirical criteria for determining environmental harm or nuisance from wood heater smoke, such as assessment of smoke composition and air quality monitoring at the affected sites, as part of EPA investigations.

#### **4. Improve measurement of air pollution**

Highlighting recommendations made by the the ACT’s 2019 State of the Environment Report, the Commissioner called for an increasein the number of air quality monitoring stations and an urgent assess of air pollutant emissions to update the National Pollutant Inventory.

#### **Why you should support the Commissioner’s recommendations**

As the Commissioner’s report observed, the evidence is irrefutable: smoke from wood heaters damages our health and constitutes a public health emergency. For several months of the year smoke from domestic wood heaters fills our streets and destroys the amenity of our neighbourhoods.

It contributes to multiple serious health conditions at all stages of life, including still births, degraded cognitive development, child and adult cancers, asthma, heart disease, strokes, dementia and depression. A recent NSW Department of the Environment report concluded that wood heater users reduce their life expectancy by approximately 12 years as a result of exposure to their wood heater. The most vulnerable are our children whose lungs are still developing, our elderly, and those who suffer from a pre-existing heart or lung condition.

As recent reporting by *The Canberra Times* has highlighted, many Canberrans are unable to venture outside because of wood smoke pollution in their neighbourhood. They are imprisoned in their own homes throughout the cooler months of the year, though they are also unsafe even at home as they are unable to prevent their neighbours' wood smoke from entering their house.

In 1991 the ACT Government's own Standing Committee on Conservation, Heritage and Environment warned of the health dangers from wood heaters. It said, "*That a potential health risk of pollutant emissions by solid fuel heaters is intensified by their near ground level release from the suburban household chimney, and a lack of control existing over their contribution to fine particle pollution has implications for public health.*" In a media release dated 6 May 2003 the then ACT Chief Minister Jon Stanhope said, "*The problem of air pollution caused by wood fires has been ignored for too long.*"

Successive ACT governments have legislated to protect us from tobacco smoke and warned us to reduce our exposure to bushfire smoke. However, there is little we can do to protect ourselves from wood heater smoke, which envelopes our neighbourhoods and homes, and can last all day, every day for several months of the year. Now is the opportunity for the ACT Government to take the lead on this issue and protect us from this extreme source of pollution.

Kind regards

Name  
Address