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Dear Westfarmers/Bunnings Management,

In November 2023 Bunnings announced it will stop selling engineered stone. Its decision was based on scientific and medical evidence that this product is linked to serious health problems.

While Bunnings is to be congratulated for this decision, it begs the question why it continues to promote and popularise wood burning in many of its stores across Australia, when all the scientific and medical evidence shows that wood heaters massively pollute and impact on public health. Soot, or black carbon, from burning wood is also a significant contributor to climate change. Therefore, we call on Bunnings to stop selling wood heaters.

To give some idea of the scale of the public health damage being done, see the attached NSW government summary of the Sydney Air Quality Study. It shows the health costs of residential wood heaters in Greater Sydney are over \$2 billion annually, topping the list of air pollution sources (see page 4). This is a massive cost created by a minority of the population, but borne by all.

Recently the ACT Government announced [wood heaters will be phased out in suburban Canberra](#). Armidale City Council has embarked on a program to reduce wood smoke pollution in that city by replacing wood heaters with cleaner forms of heating. Despite opposition from the wood heating industry, it is also moving to ban the installation of wood heaters in all new homes. Wood heaters are already banned in parts of Sydney and many other large cities overseas. Meanwhile, there have been calls to phase out or ban wood heaters in parts of Western Australia, Tasmania and Victoria. These decisions have been welcomed by many peak environmental and health groups including [Asthma Australia](#), the [ACT Conservation Council](#), Australian National University [HEAL Network](#) and the [Centre for Safe Air](#).

The ACT Government's decision is supported by a survey that found 89 per cent of Canberra residents support phasing out wood heaters due to air quality issues. Seventy-three per cent said they were impacted by wood heater smoke. The survey also showed only 11 per cent of Canberra households have a wood heater and only 5 per cent burn wood as their primary source of heating.

Meanwhile the ACT Government's 2023 [State of the Environment Report](#) confirms wood heaters are the major source of Canberra's air pollution. The report blames wood heaters for 75% of Canberra's fine particle air pollution, for the majority of total exceedances in air pollution standards and warns smoke from wood heaters can impact on public health.

The ACT Government has also introduced legislation to enshrine the [‘right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment’](#) including clean air into the Human Rights Act 2004. If passed, the ACT Government will be the first jurisdiction in Australia to recognise the right to a healthy environment in law.

The health impact of wood heaters in Canberra is also highlighted in a recent study by researchers from the Australian National University and the University of Tasmania. It found smoke from wood heaters causes as many as 63 premature deaths per year in the Australian Capital Territory. The findings were reported in the [Medical Journal of Australia \(MJA\) in November 2023](#).

One of the researchers, Professor Sotiris Vardoulakis, discussed the deadly impact of [wood heater smoke with the MJA](#). Those most at risk are the young, whose lungs are still developing, the elderly and those with a pre-existing heart or lung condition. Take the case of [66-year-old David Bolton](#) as an example. David was admitted to Canberra Hospital with breathing difficulties, as he fought the ACT bureaucracy and an unsympathetic neighbour over wood smoke pollution. [David died in early 2023](#).

Based on all the evidence we have a situation in Canberra where a minority of households are responsible for the majority of our air pollution and unnecessarily adding to our health burden.

Despite the fact this issue and supporting evidence has been pointed out to your company in the past, you continue to promote wood heaters and wood burning in your stores. It flies in the face of [the statements on your own website](#), quote; *“We pursue sustainability within our operations by striving to make them socially responsible and environmentally aware and economically viable...We seek to lessen our environmental impact in ways that are measurable including: achieving better and more efficient use of resources; ensuring our suppliers operate sustainably and ethically; encouraging and educating customers about environmentally friendly alternatives.”* Therefore, we can only conclude that Bunnings does not stand by what it publicly espouses and chooses to ignore all the environmental health evidence and science that clearly demonstrates residential wood burning is damaging to our health and the environment.

We believe Bunnings should demonstrate more of a social conscience, leadership, responsibility, and concern for the health of its customers and the environment by refusing to sell wood heaters in all your Canberra stores. As time goes on, using a wood heater will be akin to smokers being thrust out on the street and away from others.