

Push to ban wood heaters

By Katina Curtis

SLOW combustion wood burning heaters could be banned in Canberra by 2015 if a community group's wish is granted.

At its May meeting, the Tuggeranong Community Council (TCC) called on the government to ban the installation of new slow combustion heaters from the start of next year and get rid of them completely by January 2015.

The council unanimously passed the motion, which also noted "with extreme concern, statistics released by Professor John Todd of the Clean Air Society of Australia and New Zealand showing that more than 53 per cent of air pollution in the Tuggeranong Valley is generated by domestic wood burning for heating" and that "average monthly air pollution readings taken at Monash between 2004 and 2008 show that the level of fine particle air pollution more than doubled in the Tuggeranong Valley every winter, and exceeds acceptable national levels".

The issue of woodsmoke pollution in the valley is a long-running and emotional one.

The motion's proponent declined to be interviewed by *The Chronicle*, saying the matter had in the past led to physical violence between neighbours.

Labor member for Brindabella Joy Burch said it was an issue that had been raised with her many times, with people particularly concerned about the effects on their children's health.

Medical lung specialist James Markos, who helped the campaign to reduce the wood smoke levels in his home of Launceston, said wood smoke was "very bad news" and had been



Greens MLA Amanda Bresnan and Tuggeranong Community Council president Rosemary Lissimore would like a ban on wood heaters. Picture: Elesa Lee

proven to increase the risk of lung and heart disease. He likened air pollution from wood smoke to passive inhalation of tobacco smoke, saying the only difference was governments had acted to protect people from tobacco smoke as far as possible.

"If the health of the population is at risk, I reckon there's more reason to

ban wood heaters than ban tobacco," he said. The Greens have taken up the TCC's cause, with member for Brindabella Amanda Bresnan saying she intended to seek community opinion about the phasing out of wood heaters.

"I am concerned about anecdotal evidence that more people are buying

wood heaters than gas," she said.

"We need to use a range of incentives and restrictions to improve the situation."

Ms Burch also said she was keen to hear community feedback on the proposal, though it was important to find a solution that would not disadvantage families or wood fire-related

business. The ACT Government does have a rebate scheme to encourage people to replace their wood heaters with gas, however just 721 households have taken advantage of this since 2004.

Environment minister Simon Corbell said so far this year there had been 76 applications under the scheme.

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