



SUBMISSION COVERSHEET

WORKING TOWARDS A NATIONAL CLEAN AIR AGREEMENT DISCUSSION PAPER

Written submissions on the *Working towards a National Clean Air Agreement* discussion paper are being sought by the Australian Government Department of the Environment. The Department is leading the development of the National Clean Air Agreement in cooperation with jurisdictions.

Submissions are due by 17 April 2015. Further information, including how to make a submission, is provided on the Department's website.

Important information on privacy and confidentiality is provided in this document. Please read this information carefully prior to completing your submission.

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Date:	17/4/15

By completing this coversheet I/we acknowledge that my/our submission will be made publicly available



Working towards a National Clean Air Agreement - submission

Via email: Airquality@environment.gov.au

20 April 2015

Environment East Gippsland Inc has been working to protect the environment for over 30 years and has a supporter/membership base of over 1,000 people. We welcome this discussion but fear an agreement will not have legislative teeth and urge that the outcome be strong, meaningful and enforceable.

We appreciate being given extra time to lodge our comments.

REGIONAL CLEAN AIR ISSUE – BURNING

First and foremost, in regional areas the annual air pollution events which impact on the greatest number of people over the largest areas, are government planned burns, both logging coupe burns and fire management burns. These produce the dangerous PM 2.5 for days on end. As politically difficult as this is proving, it must be addressed at a national level.

During these times, mostly over the autumn months, hospital admissions surge. Especially affected are children, the elderly and those with respiratory or cardiac ailments, believed to account for 20% of the population

The choking smoke also has multi-million dollar impact on rural industries such as tourism and grape growing as well as on the small industries where people work outdoors. It's unrealistic to advise people to lock themselves indoors during the weeks of burning.

EEG suggests there be:

- Revised minimum levels of PM 2.5 in accordance with latest international health data.
- Wide-ranging regional air quality monitoring and effective, real-time reporting to the public.

Submission on the Working towards a National Clean Air Agreement discussion paper.

- An urgent review of the short and long term health effects and financial impacts of planned burns. This should also assess more up-to-date and effective measures to keep communities fire-safe. Meanwhile, states should immediately install EPA air quality monitoring for fine particles in communities impacted by management burns.

We need effective means to keep communities safe in fire events, but we also need to be assured that this is the most cost effective means and does not come at huge cost to public health and the viability of regional businesses.

GIPPSLANDS COAL FIRED POWER COSTS TO COMMUNITY HEALTH

As reported in the [Sunday Age](#) 19/4/15 a groundbreaking new report reveals for the first time the true 'social cost' of our state's archaic coal-fired power stations.

The figures come from two researchers at Harvard University who were so appalled by the pollution from the Hazelwood mine fire that they set about understanding how much pollution the power station emits even at the best of times.

Using a model developed by the US National Academy of Sciences, they came up with staggering figures on air pollution and carbon emissions produced by Victoria's brown coal power stations.

Hazelwood is costing \$100 million in health damage and \$817 million in carbon emissions every year. Yallourn power station, owned by EnergyAustralia, is costing us about the same. And the Anglesea power station emits so much sulphur dioxide that it causes around \$170 million in health problems year in, year out.

In the Harvard study, the biggest pollution costs came from Loy Yang A power station, owned by AGL, clocking in at \$1.2 billion per year. AGL announced it would phase out its coal-fired power stations ... in 35 years time. This is hardly taking decisive and urgent action that is needed. A 2050 timeline is an insult to the community.

GENERAL COMMENTS

EEG believes the agreement must look at the most serious pollution sources as a priority. Tackling smaller sources which are politically easier, while ignoring the major polluters must not be the outcome. Major polluters are often big business or government itself. To seriously tackle air pollution this must be acknowledged and addressed.

The agreement MUST bring about significant reductions in pollution levels across all states and territories. There MUST be a mandatory mechanism to ensure an agreement is actually adhered to rather than just another motherhood statement designed to placate the masses. There must not be self-regulation but clean air legislation which is enforceable.

EEG also would like to see the National Pollution Inventory made into a more useful tool with decent resourcing.

The community is able to choose what food it eats thanks to labelling laws (though still to be improved), but has no choice on the air it breathes. Being forced to take in toxic pollutants is as much a human rights issue as an environment issue. Toxic atmospheric pollutants can be many times worse than cigarette smoke as they often linger for days on end and can be extremely toxic and/or dangerous to people's health.

We look forward to a workable agreement which does not protect major polluters and pollution sources at the cost of public health. Cleaning Australia's air will have a price tag on it but industries and governments can afford to adopt and implement clean air strategies. The economic cost to individuals and the possible increased burden on the health system could be a far greater cost.

A agreement to clean up Australia's worst air pollution sources and a robust legislative mechanism to achieve this would be a fantastic outcome.