



Legislative Assembly Environment and Planning Committee  
Parliament House  
Spring Street  
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

## WRITTEN SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO HEALTH IMPACTS OF AIR POLLUTION IN VICTORIA

BY THE GOULBURN MURRAY CLIMATE ALLIANCE

Thank you for the opportunity to submit to this inquiry.

The alliance includes 13 council members across north and north east Victoria and wishes to make comment regarding TOR (a) state-wide practical, real-time, cost-effective mitigation strategies.

### (i) Smoke pollution from bushfire

Smoke from forest and grass fires creates significant air pollution leading to impacts on health of affected populations. The bushfires of 2019 showed that pollution from intense bushfires can affect any population, including major cities. The increasing frequency and intensity of bushfires is being driven by climate change. Only returning to a safe climate can provide the state and national mitigation to counter the increase in frequency of health effects due to bushfires.

This requires the adoption of urgent, but practical, carbon emission reduction.

Recently researched reduction targets in line with a limit of 1.5 degrees warming are

- The Victorian independent expert panel report (2019) for Interim Emissions Reduction Targets for Victoria (2021-2030) finding of a 68% carbon reduction by 2030
- Expert research for the Climate Change Authority (Jan 2021) found a 75% reduction is needed by 2030.

Multiple reports have demonstrated it is practical to achieve reductions of this order by accelerating existing and near-commercial technology in renewable energy, and zero carbon transport by 2030.

**Setting and achieving recommended targets of carbon emission reduction by 2030 in line with a limit of 1.5 degrees of warming will achieve significant and enduring health benefits, and decrease the risk of harm caused by bushfires, including smoke pollution.**

### (ii) Health impacts of pollution from combustion vehicles

The Australian Senate Select Committee Inquiry on Electric Vehicles (2019) received information demonstrating the significant impact of transport pollution

- Clean Air and Urban Landscape Hub and the Melbourne Energy Institute estimate that air pollution due to vehicle emissions caused 1 715 deaths in Australia in 2015, a number larger than the national road toll for the same year.
- the economic cost of air pollution from the transport sector to be as high as \$17.4 billion in 2018.

Electrification of transport will directly reduce health impacts arising from combustion vehicle emissions. The Victorian government is establishing electric vehicle charge stations on major routes, and Councils are using local knowledge to identify infill sites to complete a regional fast charging network that will encourage electric vehicle travel and link to interstate charge networks.

**State action, through funding support and policy settings to encourage transition to electric vehicles, can accelerate the air quality benefits of a transition to electric vehicles.**

(iii) Seasonal smoke pollution in rural areas due to wood heaters

In northern Victoria, significant numbers of households still use firewood for heating, cooking and water heating. This was investigated by the Northern Victoria Firewood and Home Heating Project (NVFHHP Jan 2018). Up to half the households in the study area relies on firewood, with nearly half of those having no other source of heating. About 40% of these firewood dependent households are concession card holders.

Wood smoke is a pollutant in rural towns in winter, especially in still conditions where cool nights trap smoke close to the ground. Victorian EPA does not monitor air pollution locally, the only station in the Hume region being at Wangaratta, relevant for a 15km radius. The EPA advises there is no relevant information to judge the extent or health impacts of this issue. Nonetheless, replacing wood burning heaters and cooking would provide multiple benefits including improved indoor air quality and township winter air quality.

Recommendation 9 of the NVFHHP has considerable co-benefits

‘plan and implement a program of home energy assessment, energy efficient retrofit, install split system and rooftop solar’ (for vulnerable households).

This will enable efficiency by retaining heat in the house, combined with installation of split system technology to replace wood heaters. The Solar Victoria ‘Energy efficient heating and cooling’ program will achieve part of this recommendation with rebates for split systems.

**In rural areas, reduce smoke pollution by implementing a targeted communication program to give priority and encourage uptake of the Solar Victoria scheme by eligible vulnerable households - based on criteria identified in Recommendation 9 of the Northern Victoria Firewood and Home Heating Project.**

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.

Regards

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*The GMCA has recently changed its name from Goulburn Broken Greenhouse Alliance to reflect the geographic expansion of the group to 16 councils and members across the Goulburn Broken and North East areas of Victoria.*

## **COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP OF THE GOULBURN MURRAY CLIMATE ALLIANCE**

Alpine Shire Council  
Benalla Rural City Council  
Campaspe Shire Council  
Greater Shepparton City Council  
Indigo Shire Council  
Mansfield Shire Council  
Moirra Shire Council  
Mitchell Shire Council  
Murrindindi Shire Council  
Strathbogie Shire Council  
Towong Shire Council  
Wangaratta Rural City  
City of Wodonga