

13 July 2021

Local Laws Review Project Team  
Moreton Bay Regional Council  
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Caboolture QLD 4510

By email: [local.laws@moretonbay.qld.gov.au](mailto:local.laws@moretonbay.qld.gov.au)

To whom it may concern,

**Re: Local Laws Review – fires and fire pits**

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in Moreton Bay Regional Council's review of Local Laws. Asthma Australia's comments concern Local Law No. 3 (Community and Environmental Management) Part 4, Section 7, on fires.

Asthma Australia is the peak body for people with asthma. Asthma is a life-long chronic condition of the airways which affects 12% of Queenslanders. People with asthma experience inflammation in the airways in response to triggers. These triggers cause the airways to narrow, resulting in breathing difficulties and, in some cases, medical emergencies and even death.

Asthma Australia urges Moreton Bay Regional Council to retain the current local laws which do not permit fires on properties 3000m<sup>2</sup> or less. We note the current laws do allow cooking on barbeques. Allowing residents to light fires in backyards would have serious consequences for people with asthma as exposure to smoke can trigger asthma symptoms and result in life-threatening asthma exacerbations.

Biomass smoke from fire pits, wood heaters and bushfires contains fine particulate matter or PM2.5. PM2.5 which is a well-researched asthma trigger and is particularly harmful to people with asthma and other respiratory conditions, pregnant people, children and infants, older people and people with cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes.

Asthma Australia was disappointed when Brisbane City Council introduced an additional source of air pollution with its fire pit and brazier trial in 2020. Since the beginning of this trial, we have been contacted by people in Brisbane who have experienced increased asthma symptoms and asthma exacerbations because of smoke from neighbours' fires. For example, a Brisbane resident told us:

*"The smoke from the backyard fires that has occurred since this trial started is having a significant impact on my family and many other residents in the community, in particular children, the elderly and those with asthma, respiratory illness and cardiovascular illness. Increasing the amount of smoke pollution in Brisbane also increases the vulnerability of those with or at risk of COVID-19."*

Since Moreton Bay Regional Council announced the review of Local Laws, including fires, we have also been contacted by Moreton Bay residents concerned about the health impacts that would result from residents being permitted to burn in backyards.

There is no safe level of exposure to particulate matter, meaning that smoke from a single backyard fire pit that travels through a neighbourhood could cause harm for many residents. We know that woodburning heaters in urban areas contribute significantly to particulate matter pollution, with research in the Greater Metropolitan Region of Sydney showing indoor wood fire heaters are the most important source of fine particulate matter or PM2.5.<sup>i</sup> Research in Tasmania has showed that wood fire heater smoke was responsible for more premature deaths than bushfire smoke.<sup>ii</sup>

A representative survey of over 25,000 people commissioned by Asthma Australia in 2020 found most people support the introduction of regulations to reduce the impact of woodfire heaters.<sup>iii</sup> There is widespread community understanding of that woodsmoke is harmful to human health, with three-quarters of the population agreeing that woodfire heaters can cause health problems for certain people. There is also widespread support for regulations to reduce the impact of woodfire heaters, with more than three-quarters of the general population agreeing woodfire heaters should not be allowed in urban or built-up areas and over half agreeing they should be phased out or banned. While woodfire heaters can be a necessity to heat households which can't afford to replace them with alternative heating methods, backyard fire pits serve no purpose other than the enjoyment of those using them.

In addition to the health consequences of smoke from backyard fires, Asthma Australia is concerned that allowing fires would introduce new safety risks. For example, there is the risk of burn injuries, particularly for children, the risk of fire spreading to homes and other assets, and bushfire risk.

Asthma Australia understands reasons put forward to Moreton Bay Regional Council in favour of allowing backyard fires include social gatherings and cooking. We do not feel these reasons outweigh the negative health impacts on neighbours or the safety risks. People can cook in their backyards using barbeques and social gatherings can be enjoyed without fires. Backyard fires simply are not suitable in urban areas where many vulnerable people will be exposed to smoke.

Asthma Australia asks Moreton Bay Regional Council to retain the current local laws on fires which do not permit fires on properties 3000m<sup>2</sup> or less. This will place the health, wellbeing and safety of many members of your community ahead of the desire of some to use fire pits. If you would like more information, please contact Asthma Australia's Policy and Advocacy Manager, Angela Cartwright: [acartwright@asthma.org.au](mailto:acartwright@asthma.org.au) / 0421 197 555.

Yours sincerely,



**Michele Goldman**  
CEO, Asthma Australia

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<sup>i</sup> Broome, R.A. et al (2020) The mortality effect of PM2.5 sources in the Greater Metropolitan Region of Sydney, Australia, Environment International, Vol 137.

<sup>ii</sup> Borchers-Arriagada, N. et al (2020) Health Impacts of Ambient Biomass Smoke in Tasmania, Australia. Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health, 17, 3264.

<sup>iii</sup> Asthma Australia (2021) Woodfire Heaters and Health Survey Key Findings Report, available online: <https://asthma.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Asthma-Australia-Woodfire-Heaters-and-Health-Survey-Report.pdf>