

QUEANBEYAN-PALERANG REGIONAL COUNCIL

REVISED DRAFT SOLID FUEL HEATER POLICY

Asthma Australia, March 2025

Asthma Australia welcomes the opportunity to comment on Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council's (QPRC) Revised Draft Solid Fuel Heater Policy (Revised Draft Policy). We commend QPRC for pursuing this policy, which identifies areas in the Queanbeyan-Palerang Local Government Area (LGA) where installation of solid fuel heaters, commonly referred to as wood heaters, will not be permitted. The intended outcome, "To protect the health of residents in the Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council Local Government Area by minimising air pollution from wood smoke", is particularly important for people with asthma. For the reasons detailed in our [joint submission](#) with the Centre for Safe Air and the Healthy Environments and Lives (HEAL) National Research Network supporting the original Draft Solid Fuel Heater Policy (Original Draft Policy), Asthma Australia supports the Revised Draft Policy.

The Revised Draft Policy clearly states the scope of the proposed policy: it would apply only to applications for new wood heaters, and only within the LGA's urban areas. Further, it clearly states the proposed policy does not apply to replacement of existing, approved wood heaters, and does not require removal of existing wood heaters. Asthma Australia notes this scope was also clearly stated in the Original Draft Policy.

Asthma Australia has analysed the comments included in the section of the Post Exhibition Report concerning the Original Draft Policy entitled "Comments received Against the policy". We identified 20 comments that focused on concerns outside the scope of the Original Draft Policy and should not have informed the Recommendation to Council. Additionally, we identified 8 comments that were apparently misclassified, as they supported the Original Draft Policy or called for even stronger measures, similar to comments included in the section "Comments received For the policy".

Of the comments raising objections within the scope of the proposed policy, Asthma Australia identified more than 100 comments that were inconsistent with evidence or reflected misconceptions. For example, there were comments stating wood heaters do not contribute to poor air quality or related health problems, as well as comments stating wood heaters are an affordable or environmentally sustainable home heating option. Asthma Australia's [joint submission](#) with the Centre for Safe Air and the HEAL National Research Network on the Original Draft Policy addresses these issues.

The Post Exhibition Report's Recommendation to Council to "not adopt a Solid Fuel Heater Policy at this time" appeared to be largely based on "the community feedback received". Asthma Australia is therefore concerned by the high number of comments that were apparently misclassified, irrelevant to the proposed policy, not supported by evidence, or based on misconceptions. We also note the Post Exhibition Report included data from a quantitative question, "Do you support the draft Solid Fuel Heating Policy which will prevent the installation of new solid fuel heaters in urban areas?", with 80 of the 97 respondents indicating support. Given our analysis of the qualitative comments,

some of these respondents may not have understood the scope of the policy, may have been unaware of evidence concerning the impacts of wood heaters on air quality, and/or may have held misconceptions around cost and sustainability.

Asthma Australia is also concerned the consultation survey around the Revised Draft Policy is not limited to residents of the Queanbeyan-Palerang LGA. While respondents must select an option for their connection to Queanbeyan-Palerang, the options include visiting the area and working or owning a business in the area, along with living or paying rates in Queanbeyan-Palerang. Asthma Australia therefore encourages QPRC to seek input from residents of urban areas affected by smoke pollution from wood heaters, as they will receive the greatest health benefits from policies to aiming to minimise wood heater smoke pollution, such as the Revised Draft Policy.

Additionally, while Asthma Australia recognises the importance of consultation with residents of the LGA, we urge Council to only consider comments received during the current consultation that relate to the scope of the Revised Draft Policy. Critically, QPRC must also consider public health evidence concerning the substantial health damage caused by wood heater air pollution when deciding the outcome of a policy aiming to protect residents' health in the LGA by minimising air pollution from wood smoke. Asthma Australia's [joint submission](#) with the Centre for Safe Air and HEAL National Research Network outlines this evidence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: In determining whether to adopt the Revised Draft Solid Fuel Heater Policy, Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council (QPRC) should:

- a. Only consider community feedback relevant to scope of the Revised Draft Solid Fuel Heater Policy;
- b. Seek and consider feedback from Queanbeyan-Palerang Local Government Area (LGA) residents of areas affected by smoke pollution from wood heaters; and
- c. Consider public health evidence concerning the impacts of wood heaters on air quality and health.

Recommendation 2: QPRC should adopt the Revised Draft Solid Fuel Heater Policy so that:

- a. Applications to install wood heaters in in the urban areas of the Queanbeyan-Palerang LGA will not be approved; and
- b. Council may take enforcement action if unapproved wood heaters are found.

Recommendation 3: QPRC should allocate sufficient resourcing for compliance and enforcement action to:

- a. Identify and remove unapproved wood heaters; and
- b. Investigate and address complaints about wood heater smoke.

Recommendation 4: QPRC should develop and consult on additional measures to improve air quality and health outcomes, including:

- a. Removing the exclusion for replacement of existing wood heaters with new wood heaters in urban areas of the LGA; and
- b. Providing incentives and requirements to replace existing wood heaters with efficient, electric alternatives.

ABOUT ASTHMA AUSTRALIA

Asthma is a chronic respiratory condition affecting nearly 2.8 million Australians (11%), with children being the most impacted. It can severely restrict breathing, disrupt daily life, and, in extreme cases, lead to life-threatening complications, including respiratory failure. In 2022-23, more than 31,000 people were hospitalised due to asthma - 43% of them children.¹ At least one Australian loses their life to asthma every day.²

Asthma Australia is the peak body representing people with asthma. Our goal is to halve preventable hospitalisations by 2030. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), 80% of asthma-related hospital admissions could be prevented through quality primary health care and effective community-based prevention.³

To achieve this, we deliver education and support services for people with asthma, their carers, teachers, and health professionals to improve asthma management and quality of life. We advocate for health reforms that improve access to care, optimise treatment, reduce health inequities, and address environmental triggers like poor air quality. We also raise funds and drive groundbreaking research to one day cure asthma.

Our work is grounded in evidence and shaped by the voices and lived experiences of those affected by asthma. For more, visit asthma.org.au

REFERENCES

¹ Australian Institute of Health Welfare (AIHW). 2024. Principal diagnosis data cubes. Separation statistics by principle diagnosis, Australia 2022-23.

² Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). Causes of Death, Australia, 2023, 2022, 2021, 2019, 2018.

³ AIHW. 2024. Potentially preventable hospitalisations in Australia by small geographic areas, 2020–21 to 2021–22.