

Premier

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Mr John Ramsay  
Chair  
Environment Protection Authority  
GPO Box 1550  
HOBART TAS 7001

26 FEB 2010

Dear Mr Ramsay

You will be aware of the recent "Australian Story" report on water quality in the Georges River, which focused on toxicity in surface foam linked to eucalyptus plantations in the catchment. The Director of Public Health, Dr Roscoe Taylor has recommended to Government that a process be established to address the scientific research issues raised in the "Australian Story" ABC television program. Dr Taylor has further recommended that I invite you, as the independent Chair of the Board of the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) to oversee the gathering of the evidence and its assessment by relevant experts.

It is clear that public concern regarding the report on the studies carried out by Drs Bleaney and Scammel warrant further investigation and it is likely that further research will be required to ensure that the implications of the findings reported in the program are clear, and that the people of St Helens can have confidence in the safety of their drinking water. It is important that the issue is considered objectively and scientifically and that the public can have confidence in the findings of the review and any further studies that are undertaken.

Therefore, I request that you establish and convene a suitably qualified panel to:

1. Review the results of the research carried out by Drs Bleaney and Scammel and any other relevant studies;
2. Decide whether any further characterisation of toxins in water and their source or toxicity studies are required to help determine whether the toxicity reported on "Australian Story" represents a significant risk to:
  - a. drinking water supplies, in St Helens (or more broadly given that many water catchments in the state will contain significant areas of eucalypts);
  - b. shellfish culture in Georges Bay or more broadly;
  - c. aquatic ecosystems.



3. Commission or facilitate the undertaking of any such studies by suitably qualified and independent scientists; and
4. Provide an interim and final report to the Government on the findings of the review and any further studies carried out. The final report should include recommendations as to any actions or policies arising from the investigation.

I will leave selection of the panel to your judgment but it should include representatives with expertise in water quality, public health, aquaculture, the chemistry of eucalypts and environmental toxicology. The panel will also need to consult with all relevant stakeholders.

While I understand that there are complex scientific issues involved and that any further studies required are likely to take time, it is also important that the matter is handled expeditiously to address community concerns. To that end, an interim report addressing points 1 and 2 above should be submitted to the Government of the day as soon as possible, but by the end of May 2010. If further studies or research is required priority should be given to those required to boost confidence in the safety of drinking water supplies.

I appreciate that this task will require resources above and beyond those currently available to you through the EPA, and that the full extent of these will not be known until the panel has been convened and defined the nature of any further studies required. I am prepared to commit my Government to providing adequate resources to carry out this brief.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Bartlett', written over a large, faint circular watermark or stamp.

**David Bartlett MP**  
**Premier**