City of Launceston Domestic Wood Smoke Plan

Frequently Asked Questions

The following FAQs have been developed in response to common questions raised during community consultation on the Draft Domestic Wood Smoke Plan.

Q1. Why is Council addressing domestic wood smoke?

Domestic wood smoke can affect local air quality and community health, particularly during colder months. The Domestic Wood Smoke Plan aims to reduce these impacts through education, improved information, community engagement and evidence-based actions over the long term.

Q2. How has community feedback influenced the Domestic Wood Smoke Plan?

Community feedback has played an important role in shaping the Domestic Wood Smoke Plan (the Plan). Feedback from residents and stakeholders has helped Council better understand community concerns, priorities, and experiences relating to wood smoke. This input has helped refine the Plan's staged approach to improving air quality by reducing the impacts of domestic wood smoke through education, community engagement, improved data collection and evidence-based decision-making. While wood smoke is one part of the broader air quality picture, community feedback has been invaluable in helping Council understand local needs and concerns, pace implementation appropriately, and include regular review points to assess progress before moving into future phases.

Q3. Will wood heaters or open fireplaces be banned or required to be replaced?

No. The Domestic Wood Smoke Plan does not propose a ban on wood heaters or open fireplaces, nor does it require existing heaters to be removed or replaced. The current focus is on education, best-practice operation and maintenance, and reducing emissions through improved practices. Existing regulatory powers may continue to apply to individual non-compliant heaters where smoke issues cannot be resolved. Any broader future measures would only be considered following further evidence, community consultation and Council endorsement.

Q4. What is the Domestic Wood Smoke Plan and how will it be implemented?

The Domestic Wood Smoke Plan outlines a long-term, staged approach to improving air quality and reducing the impacts of wood smoke across the municipality. The Plan includes a 15-year pathway designed to allow households, businesses and Council to adapt over time, with a focus on education, evidence-based decision-making, collaboration with government, industry and research institutions, implementation of regulatory measures, and gradual investigation and adoption of new compliance measures. As part of the Plan, Council proposes expanding air quality monitoring across Launceston to:

- Build a clearer understanding of local air quality conditions
- Provide more accurate and locally relevant data
- Identify areas experiencing poorer air quality
- Deliver more accessible, real-time air quality information to the community
- Make informed decisions on future education, actions, initiatives

Years 1-5: Focus on education and support

The first stage is centred on awareness and practical help, not new rules. This includes:

- Clear information about the health impacts of wood smoke
- Guidance on using and maintaining wood heaters more effectively
- Support for households interested in cleaner heating options and home efficiency improvements (healthier homes initiative)
- Continuation of regulating complaints relating to smoking chimneys
- Collaborating with industry, retailers, government and research institutions
- Building data bases to inform future decision making

Years 6-10: Considered, targeted action

Year 6 will provide a key review point, with data, community feedback and early implementation outcomes analysed and reported back to Council to seek continued endorsement before moving into the next phase of the Plan. The Plan includes the continued use of Council's existing regulatory responsibilities, and where appropriate, the introduction of new regulatory measure and initiatives. Any future new regulations would only be explored after further community input and Council endorsement. If introduced, they would be targeted and based on evidence, focusing on the highest-emission heaters, and new build homes rather than applying broad restrictions.

Years 11-15: Long-term improvement

Year 11 marks the beginning of the Plan's longer-term phase, where future actions will be guided by evidence, progress to date, global and Australian public health objectives, and further Council consideration. The long-term aim is to improve air quality and support community health, while continuing to consider fairness, affordability and household choice.

Q5. How will the Plan affect households that rely on wood heating?

Council recognises that many households rely on wood heating. The Plan seeks to improve air quality through better information, practical education, stronger local data and staged, evidence-based action. Residents may see more proactive education from Council, opportunities to participate in air quality monitoring or citizen science initiatives, and information about healthier, more efficient and more sustainable household choices, including heating, ventilation, mould prevention and home efficiency improvements. Council officers may also work directly with households where wood smoke is causing concern, including advice on wood storage, heater operation and maintenance, and practical ways to reduce emissions.

Some households may choose to replace a wood heater with a cleaner heating option as part of broader home improvements, but the immediate focus is on helping people make informed decisions that support both household needs and the collective goal of improving air quality and community health. Council encourages residents to actively participate in this initiative and help shape a healthier local environment for everyone.

Q6. How does the Plan consider renters, rental properties, new homes and new wood heater installations?

Council recognises that renters may have limited control over the type of heating used in their home, or the ability to make broader home efficiency improvements. The Plan's immediate focus is on education,

practical advice, improved data collection and community engagement, including information to assist tenants, property owners and future builders to understand wood smoke impacts, heating efficiency and healthier home choices.

As the Plan progresses, Council may consider different approaches for existing homes, rental properties, new homes and new wood heater installations. Any future changes affecting new homes or new installations would only be considered in later stages of the Plan, following further investigation, community input and Council endorsement.

Q7. Why does the Domestic Wood Smoke Plan focus on urban areas rather than outlying areas?

The Dometic Wood Smoke Plan has been refined to focus on urban areas where population density and the potential impacts of wood smoke on neighbouring residents are typically greater. Based on the available data and assessment of priorities, areas such as Lilydale and Relbia have been removed from the plan's initial focus. This approach enables Council to target actions where they are most needed and can deliver the greatest community benefit.

Q8. Will financial assistance or support be available for households?

Council recognises affordability is an important consideration, particularly for households that rely on wood heating. No rebate program is proposed at this stage. As the Plan progresses, Council will continue to consider affordability, vulnerability and household circumstances when assessing future initiatives, support programs or incentives.

Q9. How will Council regulate or enforce the Domestic Wood Smoke Plan?

Council's primary focus is education and support. Existing regulatory powers relating to smoke nuisance and non-compliant heaters will continue to apply, including responding to complaints. A new bylaw is not proposed at this stage. Any future regulatory measures or bylaw proposals would only be considered following evidence gathering, community consultation and Council endorsement.

Q10. Will Council do air quality monitoring as part of the Domestic Wood Smoke Plan?

Yes. Council will explore opportunities to deploy more air quality monitoring equipment to strengthen the data base and improve understanding of local air quality conditions. Enhanced monitoring will help inform decision-making, track trends over time, and support the ongoing implementation of the Domestic Wood Smoke Plan.

Q11. What can residents do now to reduce domestic wood smoke?

Residents can take practical steps now to reduce domestic wood smoke and improve local air quality. This includes burning only dry, well-seasoned wood, storing wood correctly so it stays dry, keeping the fire burning efficiently, avoiding overnight smouldering, and regularly maintaining heaters and flues. Residents can also check whether smoke is visible from their chimney and seek advice if they are unsure whether their heater is operating effectively. Small changes in how wood is stored and burned can make a meaningful difference to smoke levels, heating efficiency and the health of the household and surrounding community.

Q12. What happens if Council receives a complaint about smoke from my chimney?

If Council receives a complaint about smoke from a chimney, the initial focus will generally be on understanding the issue and working with the household to reduce emissions. This may include providing education and practical advice on wood storage, heater operation, maintenance and ways to improve burning practices. In many cases, smoke issues can be addressed through these practical steps.

Where emissions continue to cause concern or do not meet regulatory requirements, Council may need to take further action under its existing responsibilities. The aim is to support households to reduce smoke wherever possible, while also protecting local air quality and community health.

Q13. How can residents participate in the Plan?

Residents can participate by engaging with Council's education and awareness initiatives, providing feedback during future consultation opportunities, taking practical steps to reduce wood smoke at home, and sharing local knowledge about air quality issues in their area. As the Plan progresses, there may also be opportunities to participate in air quality monitoring or citizen science initiatives. Council encourages residents to be actively involved, as community participation will be essential to improving local air quality and supporting healthier homes and neighbourhoods.

Q14. Does the Plan consider other sources of air pollution, such as traffic and industry?

Yes. Council recognises that wood smoke is one part of a broader air quality picture, which can also include sources such as traffic, industry, and planned and unplanned burns. Launceston's local topography, including surrounding hills and temperature inversion conditions, can trap smoke and make air quality impacts worse. Given the prevalence of domestic wood heaters, this is an area where practical local action can make a meaningful difference alongside broader work to understand other contributors to air pollution. Improving air quality will require a broader understanding of local conditions over time, and the Plan's focus on improved data collection will help inform future decision-making.

Q15. Why is the Domestic Wood Smoke Plan being implemented over 15 years rather than more quickly?

The Domestic Wood Smoke Plan has been designed as a staged 15-year approach to ensure actions are informed by reliable local data, community feedback and ongoing evaluation. Improving air quality is a complex, long-term challenge, and Council recognises that households, businesses and the community need time to adapt to changing expectations and make informed decisions about heating and home efficiency.

The early stages of the Plan focus on education, community engagement, air quality monitoring and building a stronger evidence base. This information will help Council better understand local air quality conditions, identify where the greatest challenges exist and determine which actions are likely to deliver the greatest benefit. The staged approach also allows Council to review progress at key milestones, consider community feedback, and assess the effectiveness of initiatives before deciding whether further actions are required. This helps ensure the Plan remains practical, evidence-based and responsive to community needs.

Q16. Will there be further opportunities for community and stakeholder input?

Yes. Engagement with external stakeholders and the community will continue to inform the implementation of the Domestic Wood Smoke Plan. Council will engage with residents and stakeholders throughout the life of the Plan to help shape future actions and ensure the approach remains evidence-based and responsive to community needs.