

OPEN LETTER

CALLING ON ALL SCIENTISTS AND MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS TO SUPPORT THE INTEGRITY OF SCIENCE IN TASMANIA

The recent release of significant eco-toxicology research by St Helens general practitioner, Dr **Alison Bleaney** and marine ecologist, Dr **Marcus Scammell** about toxicity linked to genetically selected *Eucalyptus nitens* monocultures has implications for drinking water supplies and forest industries throughout the world.

Drs Scammell and Bleaney suspected that the source of deaths and health anomalies in oyster was chemical contamination. A formal report was presented to the Tasmanian government in 2004¹. The authors assumed that this report would be a necessary catalyst for a comprehensive *Toxicity Identification & Evaluation* (TIE) investigation, but this was never done. Instead the Tasmanian authorities responded by publicly attacking its authors and discrediting their report.

In the absence of government concern, Dr Bleaney has continued to undertake ecotoxicology research on contaminants in the George River catchment² and the findings covered in the **ABC1 Australian Story** are based on repeated *in vitro* tests of the water's toxicity against invertebrate organisms and human cell lines conducted in several accredited laboratories in Australia and New Zealand.

Just as the quality of the water in the George River catchment requires **protection**, the integrity of Tasmania's reputation as a 'Clean, Green and Clever' island requires protection.

Currently *public confidence* in the Tasmanian Environment Protection authority and the Tasmanian Health Department to conduct such an important scientific investigation with the necessary independence and impartiality is particularly low. We are calling on all scientists and medical practitioners - in university, the public service and private sectors - to stand up for the integrity of independent science investigation in Tasmania.

A wholly *independent* TIE investigation of water toxicity of Tasmanian catchments is now urgently needed. For Tasmanians to have trust and confidence in any future science-based investigation into these matters, it must be completely conducted at arms length from instruments of the Tasmanian Government - the Environment Protection Agency (a branch with the Tasmanian Department of Primary Industry, Parks, Water & Environment), the office of the Director of Public Health and the Department of Health & Human Services.

Suppression of independent science and those who speak out has reached an intolerable level in Tasmania.

Alison Bleaney and Marcus Scammell's research in the George River catchment has questioned the moral leadership of the government officials responsible for public health and environmental protection.

Dr Bleaney's collaborative research has highlighted a significant public and ecological health issue that has global implications.

At no time before have Tasmanians needed to trust in independent scientific investigation - one that will be impervious to political interference or bias from Government agencies.

For Tasmanians to trust in any future scientific investigations into the toxicity of *Eucalyptus nitens* there needs to be an open and transparent scientific evaluation of the science and the capacity to invite internationally recognised experts in their field to participate in the design and methodology of future research.

Please sign up to this Open Letter by sending your acknowledgement to: davidobendorf@tassie.net.au

It is intended to publish this letter with your names, professional expertise and location before the Tasmanian state election on 20 March 2010.

¹ Scammell, M. 2004 *Environmental problems in Georges Bay, Tasmania. Report to Tasmanian Fisheries Industries Council*, 7 pages.

² *George River Catchment Investigation* (NE Tasmania) by Dr Alison Bleaney (GP) and Dr Marcus Scammell (Marine Ecology), February 2010 [see attached pdf].