

Tasmanian Public & Environmental Health Network

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Community Groups Demand Premier Take Action on Water Safety - New Victorian Research shows the way!

TPEHN has called for a commitment by the new Premier Lara Giddings to immediately undertake and implement integrated catchment management of all major water catchments in Tasmania.

This is in response to recent research findings from RMIT, Melbourne University, the Victorian Department of Primary Industry and Melbourne Water¹ which found 48 pesticides in the Yarra River (drinking water supply for Melbourne) in a five month period. The authors articulated the urgent need for widespread monitoring of water and sediment to protect aquatic ecosystems from further degradation. They also stated the “unreliability” of using grab water sampling for determining toxicity and the need for sediment and continuous water sampling for assessing toxic impacts.

The Tasmanian DPIW five year pesticide monitoring program of quarterly grab water sampling and flood event monitoring was cut back at the end of 2010 to monitor only 24 sites (previously 55) and only 2 flood events site (previously 4) with only 12 sample bottles per rain event regardless of the level of pollution.

Percival (2004) and community groups including Break O’Day Catchment Risk Group (2007)² have repeatedly asked for sediment and toxicity testing. The Tasmanian Government’s own panel (George River Water Panel)³ also articulated the urgent need for integrated catchment management.

This new Victorian study highlights the inadequacies both of the current pesticide monitoring program and the current approach taken to pesticides used in the state.

Currently 9 of the 19 pesticides routinely tested for have no guideline values (used to trigger action to identify the source of the pollution and remove it) and five have neither guideline nor health values. These include pesticides known to be toxic and those specifically with endocrine disrupting actions. The other fifty or so most toxic pesticides used in Tasmania (out of approximately 130 currently used) are not monitored and no provision is currently made for mixture effects. No attempt is being made to test for any single pesticide or mixtures for toxic impacts.

The Tasmanian Government, if it wants to promote its ‘clean and green’ image and provide safe water to all water users, needs to urgently commit to undertaking and implementing fully integrated catchment management of all its major catchments.

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¹ <http://pubs.acs.org/doi/abs/10.1021/es103227q>

² <http://www.et.org.au/system/files/file/TCRA/ucv3n3.pdf>

³ <http://www.georgeriverwater.org.au/?base=4486>

