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20 May 2015  
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on behalf of Climate Action Moreland  
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Jill Hennessy MLA  
Minister for Health  
Minister for Ambulance Services  
Level 22,  
50 Lonsdale Street  
Melbourne, VIC 3000

Dear Ms Hennessy,

I am writing to you as Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services formally on behalf of Climate Action Moreland in regards to the Heat Health Alert System, emergency response and surge capacity of health services and ambulance services during extreme heatwaves for Victoria.

This is particularly important given current Bureau of Meteorology alerts regarding an El-Nino event occurring this year,<sup>1</sup> A strong El-Nino is likely to cause higher temperatures, with early seasonal onset of hotspells, and heatwaves of greater intensity, frequency and duration.

As you are aware heatwaves are a silent killer that particularly impact the very young, the very old, those with medical conditions and also those from a lower socio-economic status.<sup>23</sup>

Heatwaves are the top cause of death in Australia of any natural disaster by a substantial margin. As Lucinda Coates and colleagues conclude in their landmark 2014 study - *Exploring 167 years of vulnerability: An examination of extreme heat events in Australia 1844–2010* - "The dangers from extreme heat within Australia remain neglected, and fundamental changes will not take place until extreme heat is given the priority it deserves as Australia's number one natural hazard killer."<sup>4</sup>

According to Loughnan et al (2013) Moreland municipality has a high to extreme vulnerability to extreme heat events, so the impact of heatwaves is very real and personal on the level of population health in our community.<sup>5</sup>

We note the Victorian Auditor General in the *Heatwave Management report* tabled in State Parliament 14 October 2014 was highly critical of the previous Liberal Party run State Government finding critical deficiencies in heatwave emergency response and governance.<sup>6</sup> We would like to be fully assured that all eight major recommendations by the Victorian Auditor General are being carried out and particularly the four specific recommendations regarding the Department of Health.

In addition to these recommendations, we particularly note that:

- While heat-related excess death rates were substantially lower in 2014 heatwave conditions, statistics on after hours doctor consultations and ambulance callouts show heat stress related conditions were still prominent exerting major stress on the capacity of the ambulance service and health system. Indeed, the spike in deaths in 2014 forced the unconventional storage of dead bodies "indicative of a disaster similar in scale to the two-week period during the 2009 heatwave that preceded Black Saturday", according to Institute of Forensic Medicine director Stephen Cordner.<sup>7</sup>

The VAGO report highlighted that during the 2014 heatwave Triple Zero emergency call-taker responded to the highest number of calls for ambulance services ever recorded, and with a doubling of Priority 0 callouts per day for metropolitan Melbourne. Clearly hospital and health facilities and Ambulance Victoria needs appropriate preparedness and resourcing for surge capacity during such events.<sup>8</sup> Is such preparation and resourcing being undertaken?

- The Heat Health Alert system threshold temperature for Melbourne is 30C Tmean, yet the most recent research in this area by Loughnan et al (2013) indicates that for Melbourne the optimum measure was daily mortality, where at a Mean daily Temperature of 28°C there was a 3 to 13 percent increase in mortality. Why the difference? Is the temperature threshold going to be reviewed? Can you provide information on how the current threshold temperature of 30C Tmean was determined and on the basis of what science and methodology?

We appreciate the early response the new Labor Government has had in starting to address climate change issues, both in mitigation and adaption, that were severely neglected through the Baillieu and Napthine Governments.

We are already experiencing climate impacts now through extreme weather events, particularly rising temperatures resulting in extreme heat events and heatwaves, but also through increase in torrential rain and flash flooding events. We need appropriate adaptation and emergency response plans in place at the state and local government level as part of our adaptation to the already changed climate

I did an extensive literature review of climate change and heatwaves in Melbourne, published in February 2015, which provides an overview of the problem and the challenges in how to respond and adapt.<sup>9</sup>

I would be pleased if you could respond to our concerns and allay our fears over lack of preparation for the next extreme heatwave event here in Victoria. We would appreciate a formal response to this letter within 30 days.

John Englart  
for Climate Action Moreland  
mob: **0408 536733**

- 1 Bureau of Meteorology ENSO Wrap-up, 12 May 2015.  
[http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/enso/archive/ensowrap\\_20150512.pdf](http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/enso/archive/ensowrap_20150512.pdf)
- 2 Huang, C., Adrian Gerard Barnett, Xiaoming Wang, Pavla Vaneckova, Gerard FitzGerald, Shilu Tong (2011) Projecting Future Heat-Related Mortality under Climate Change Scenarios: A Systematic Review. *Environmental Health Perspectives* 119 (12) pp 1681-1690  
<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0378778807000175>
- 3 Loughnan, M.E., Neville Nicholls, Nigel J. Tapper (2010) The effects of summer temperature, age and socioeconomic circumstance on Acute Myocardial Infarction admissions in Melbourne, Australia. *International Journal of Health Geographics* 2010, 9:41  
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2924270/>
- 4 Coates, L., Katharine Haynes, James O'Brien, John McAneney, Felipe Dimer de Oliveiraa, (2014) Exploring 167 years of vulnerability: An examination of extreme heat events in Australia 1844–2010. *Environmental Science and Policy*. Volume 42, October 2014, Pages 33–44
- 5 Loughnan, M.E., Tapper, NJ, Phan, T, Lynch, K, McInnes, JA (2013), A spatial vulnerability analysis of urban populations during extreme heat events in Australian capital cities, National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility, Gold Coast, 128 pp
- 6 Victorian Auditor General's Office (2014) *Heatwave Management: Reducing the Risk to Public Health*. Report tabled in State Parliament 14 October 2014
- 7 Julia Medew, *The Age*, 27 January 2014, Anger over spike in deaths during record Victorian heatwave <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/anger-over-spike-in-deaths-during-record-victorian-heatwave-20140126-31gxb.html>
- 8 Victorian Auditor General's Office (2014) *Heatwave Management: Reducing the Risk to Public Health*. Report tabled in State Parliament 14 October 2014
- 9 Englart, John (2015) Climate Change and Heatwaves in Melbourne – A Review  
<http://takvera.blogspot.com.au/2015/02/climate-change-and-heatwaves-in.html>