

Information Provision

This document outlines the EPA Board's Policy on the implementation of the requirements of the Minamata Convention on Mercury (the Convention).

Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this Policy is to outline how the requirements set out in the Convention are implemented and complied with by the Board in the exercise of its functions and powers, including environmental assessment and approvals processes for development proposals and other environmentally relevant activities.

Background

The Minamata Convention on Mercury introduces global controls to manage the harmful effects of mercury pollution. Mercury is a toxic pollutant that can circulate globally through the oceans and atmosphere for many years. It can cause significant harm to human health and the environment – acute or chronic exposure can be fatal.

Humans are mainly exposed to mercury through emissions in the air and from eating certain foods (mostly marine fish). Concerning increases in mercury concentrations have been observed in marine environments worldwide.

The Convention was agreed in January 2013 and introduces global controls to manage the harmful effects of mercury pollution. Australia became a signatory to the Convention in October 2013. The Australian Government has since indicated its intention to ratify the Convention by the end of 2021.

To reduce the impacts, the Convention controls anthropogenic mercury releases in several ways, including:

- Banning primary mercury mining.
- Regulating manufacture and trade of mercury and mercury-containing products.
- Regulating emissions from industrial facilities.
- Regulating disposal of mercury waste.

The Convention's purpose is to protect human health and the environment from anthropogenic releases of mercury and mercury compounds.

Tasmanian Legislation

Tasmania has legislation and policies in place to ensure effective management of pollutants and disposal of controlled waste. The use of mercury in manufacturing processes and other industrial activity is addressed under the *Environmental Management and Pollution Control Act 1994* (EMPCA). The *Environmental Management and Pollution Control (Waste Management) Regulations 2020* define mercury as a controlled waste. All stages of mercury disposal are covered by these regulations e.g. storage, transport, and disposal. Environmental Protection Policies (EPP) are instruments created under EMPCA. The EPP (Air Quality) addresses mercury emissions to air by setting limits on those emissions.

Mercury Use in Tasmania:

In Tasmania there is no primary mercury mining and very low mercury emission rates (less than 1 per cent of national emissions). Forty-four Tasmanian facilities recorded mercury emissions in 2019-20 with a total of 87.932 kg of mercury emissions produced in that period. The majority (86.4583 kg) came from only five facilities that are regulated activities listed on Schedule 2 of

EMPCA. These activities are already subject to permit requirements that are regulated by the EPA under EMPCA.

Policy

The Board believes the current statutory and non-statutory instruments are adequate to meet the requirements of the Convention.

The Board will ensure that the articles of the Convention are complied with when carrying out environmental assessments. Particular attention will be paid to Convention Articles that relate to matters the Board has direct responsibility for under EMPCA. This includes:

- a) Banning all mercury use in Annex B manufacturing processes (Article 5)
- b) Requiring Best Available Techniques (BAT)/Best Environmental Practice (BEP) for all new Annex D facilities – releases to air (Article 8)
- c) Controlling mercury releases to land or water - requiring BAT/BEP (Article 9)
- d) Adopting the Convention storage guidelines for mercury (Article 10)
- e) Adopting the Convention mercury waste requirements (Article 11)

The Board will also incorporate the Convention administratively by:

- a) Adopting an internal policy to not approve any Level 2 mining activity applications to mine mercury.
- b) Implementing internal policies in respect of assessments proposals for mercury emitting sites (Convention Annex D sites).
- c) Utilising Convention guidelines in setting conditions.
- d) Promoting awareness of the Convention within local government, which regulates level 1 activities under EMPCA.

A copy of the Minamata Convention can be found at:

<https://www.mercuryconvention.org/en/documents/minamata-convention-mercury-text-and-annexes>

Environment Protection Authority

GPO Box 1550 Hobart 7001

T (03) 6165 4599

E enquiries@epa.tas.gov.au

W www.epa.tas.gov.au



ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION AUTHORITY