

# »» *sugar cane burning and ash*



***Sugar cane has been grown in the Northern Rivers since the 1860s, since 1935 the crop has been burnt prior to harvesting.***

## »» **Background**

Sugar cane has a long history in the Northern Rivers. Since 1860 local farmers have been producing cane for local, national and international consumption.

## »» **Crop burning**

Before harvesting growers burn off their crops, which results in smoke clouds, ash and cinders. The smoke can travel as far as 2000 metres into the atmosphere, while the cinders and ash can fall back to the ground up eight kilometers away.

This practice occurs each year around July, November and December.

In the past, the industry did explore other ways to cut and process green cane, however they have returned to burning prior to harvesting.

The industry's reasons for continuing this practice is explained in their document *The Burning Question*, which is available at [sunshinesugar.com.au/about-us/environment](http://sunshinesugar.com.au/about-us/environment)

## »» **The impacts**

Some residents are concerned this practice impacts air pollution, climate change and the 'black snow' that can fall on houses, cars and into swimming pools.

## »» **Council's role**

Council's Public and Environmental Health Section continues to review the role council has with regards to sugar cane burning.

Council must work within the regulatory framework provided by the NSW Environment Protection Agency. Section 12(4)(a) of the Protection of the Environment Operations (Clean Air) Regulation 2010 states: an air

pollution offence is not created when vegetation is burnt for agricultural practices, as shown in the excerpt from the legislation below.

## »» **Regulation**

*Protection of the Environment Operations (Clean Air) Regulation 2010 (Part 3, Division 3, Clause 12).*

### **12 Offences**

(4) *It is not an offence under this clause:*

- (a) *to cook or barbecue in the open, or to light, maintain or use a fire for recreational purposes such as camping, picnicking, scouting or other similar outdoor activities, so long as only dry seasoned wood, liquid petroleum gas (LPG), natural gas or proprietary barbecue fuel (including a small quantity of fire starter) is used, or to burn vegetation, in the course of carrying on agricultural operations, on premises on which the vegetation grew, including:*
  - (i) *the burning of vegetation for the purposes of clearing (other than for construction), or*
  - (ii) *the burning of stubble, orchard prunings, diseased crops, weeds or pest animal habitats on farms, or*
  - (iii) *the burning of pasture for regenerative purposes,*

Therefore Council is currently unable to regulate this practice and instead advises concerned parties to **contact the Cane Growers Association on 6683 4205 to lodge concerns.**

Air Pollution can also be reported to the NSW EPA Pollution Line on 131 555.

## »» **More information**

»» ***For more information telephone council's Public and Environmental Health Section 1300 864 444.***