



Swanbank Public Health Inquiry

In 2025 the Queensland Government conducted a Public Health Inquiry (the Inquiry) into odour issues from the Swanbank and New Chum industrial areas.

Inquiry findings

Odour impacts health and wellbeing

- The odour has had a negative effect on the health and wellbeing of many Ipswich residents.
- The chemicals responsible for the odour are not toxic and there is no increased risk of cancer for people exposed.
- The most common symptoms that people experienced affected their breathing, ears, nose, throat, nerves, stomach, skin, and mental health.
- The odour made people spend less time outdoors, avoid having visitors, and worry about how their community is seen by others.
- Planned residential growth near the industrial areas will increase the number of people exposed to the odour in the coming years.

Odour comes from multiple sources

- The main cause of the odour is the waste used to feed compost (feedstock). Enclosing the composting facilities can reduce odour if correctly operated and maintained.
- There are other potential sources causing odours in the industrial areas, such as landfill, fertiliser production sites, recycling/resource recovery sites, and asphalt plants.

Monitoring and regulation could be improved

- Air quality monitoring in the area might have missed some pollutants.
- Current laws and regulations might not be strong enough to properly assess and manage the situation to reduce the risks.

Recommendations

To reduce the odour impacts and protect community health and wellbeing, the Inquiry recommended:

- **providing some immediate relief** to the community from the most offensive odours by working with compost operators in the industrial areas
- **exploring long-term solutions** to reduce odours, through the construction of enclosed composting operations or relocating composters
- **applying these recommendations** to the other commercial composting site in Ipswich
- **auditing remaining odour-producing companies** and develop an odour management plan for the industrial areas
- **expanding the air monitoring program** to better identify pollutants that may impact the community's health
- **protecting future residential developments** from being built too close to the odour sources
- **leveraging existing laws and considering improvements to legislation** to better manage odour
- **setting up an inter-departmental committee** to oversee and coordinate actions.

The Queensland Government supports the Inquiry recommendations and will work with local government, industry and the community to put them into action over the coming months.

Laws to address odour issues

The government has considered whether the *Public Health Act 2005* is the most appropriate legal framework to bring odour relief to Ipswich residents. After reviewing the options, the *Environmental Protection Act 1994* was found to be a stronger legislative tool to address odour issues. *The Environmental Protection Act 1994* was updated in 2024 to include human health, safety, and wellbeing in the definition of 'environment', and was amended to clarify odour nuisance can now be treated as environmental harm.

Progress is underway

The Queensland Government is already making changes through the Department of the Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation. This includes:

- court orders requiring the adoption of immediate on-site improvements, followed by in-vessel composting by 2026 and fully enclosed systems by 2028
- amended licences for other composting operators to adopt immediate improvements and stop receiving odorous feedstocks by 2026
- strengthened regulations providing powers to the regulator to consider imposing conditions on composting operators near residential zones
- issued penalties, including a record fine for odour nuisance
- expanded air monitoring, including public access to current monitoring data.

Community odour complaints have reduced by 70% in the past year, showing that changes are making a difference.

Health support is available

If you are experiencing symptoms due to odour, please seek medical help.

- Talk to your GP or call 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84) for 24/7 confidential advice from a registered nurse.
- Visit the Queensland Government website and search 'mental health and wellbeing' for more information on mental health support (www.qld.gov.au/health/mental-health-and-wellbeing).
- Ipswich Medicare Mental Health Centre, formerly known as Ipswich Head to Health, is a free, federally funded service for adult mental health care. You can walk in without an appointment or referral needed.
- In an emergency, call triple zero (000).



Visit www.health.qld.gov.au/swanbank-inquiry for further information.

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