

## 13 Nov 2007 : TASK Welcomes the People's Inquiry Report

TASK welcomes the publication of the People's Inquiry Report.

TASK is an informal network of concerned teachers and parents in West Auckland who strongly objected to their students and children being repeatedly exposed to the bio-aerosols of Foray48B during the MAF Painted Apple Moth Eradication Campaign 2002-2005.

The People's Inquiry, held over 5 days in March 2006, enabled the West Auckland community to voice their experiences of the health, economic and traumatic impacts on their lives of the MAF aerial spraying campaign from 2002 &ndash; 2005.

These were not just a "small group of activists" as stereotyped by Biosecurity Minister Jim Anderton . The people who presented submissions to the Inquiry came from a wide cross-section of West Auckland citizenry, who felt strongly enough about the devastating impact of the aerial spraying on their lives, to speak out and have their stories recorded. "My teaching colleague, Viv Shapcott, unfortunately didn't survive to be able to present her submission to the People's Inquiry. Every sprayday impacted on her health and sadly she succumbed to an aggressive motor neurone disease which she firmly believed was triggered by the sprays," said Stephanie McKee, who was Head of Music at Kelston Girls' College at the time of the spraying campaign.

One of the Commissioners, Dr Tom Kerns, concluded that MAF's risk-assessment approach to decision-making violated a number of International Human Rights standards and conventions that New Zealand governments have signed up to. In particular, the principle of informed consent, the core of the Nuremberg Code, was certainly violated by the repeated aerial spraying of an urban population with undisclosed chemicals, and this point was also emphasised by Sir Geoffrey Palmer in his opinion on the legality of the MAF two- year spraying blitz.

The MAF aerial spraying programme indeed had harmful social and educational impacts on schools, teachers and students as documented in the 70 submissions to the People's Inquiry. As the People's Inquiry Report has also pointed out, the spraying programme discriminated against young people, who have increased vulnerability to toxicants, due to their smaller body weight and increased breathing rate compared to adults.

"School teachers and Boards of Trustees are duty bound under law to protect the health and safety of their students, yet here was a government department spraying Foray48B with its bacteria and assorted unknown chemicals over school playgrounds and preschools. A group of parents and teachers, concerned about the health and educational impacts of the spraying on teachers and students, signed a petition to the Minister of Education who refused to accept it, and who passed it on to the Minister of Biosecurity, and from there it disappeared into the black hole of non-response," said Stephanie McKee.

"We encourage all parents, teachers and school boards of trustees to read the Report of the People's Inquiry. Anyone can go to [www.peoplesinquiry.co.nz](http://www.peoplesinquiry.co.nz) to download a copy."

We also trust that it will be studied closely, and not hastily dismissed, by the Biosecurity Ministry, the Health Ministry, the Education Ministry, the Human Rights Commissioner, the Commissioner for Children, the Commissioner for the Environment, the Solicitor General and the Ombudsman, to name a few government departments that should take an interest in the findings of this report.

We are optimistic that the recommendations of the Report, when they have been looked at carefully, will lead to amendments to the Biosecurity Act that will take into account society's responsibilities to uphold human health and human rights standards.

A sincere apology to those who suffered health effects, trauma and economic impacts, due to the aerial spraying programme, might help repair the broken trust between the people of West Auckland and the government.

TASK acknowledges that the work of the Biosecurity Ministry is very important for New Zealand's economy and ecology, but for biosecurity measures to be effective in the long term, MAF needs to work in partnership with communities and to not alienate potential biosecurity volunteers.

Students and children are told to pick themselves up and learn from their mistakes, to say sorry to people harmed by their thoughtless actions, and make amends for any wrongdoing. TASK believes that these ethical standards should equally apply to Government agencies.