

## FIRE AT THOMAS FOODS INTERNATIONAL Community information

Issued 12 January 2018

On Wednesday 3 January 2018, the Thomas Foods International (TFI) facility at Murray Bridge was severely damaged by fire.

The EPA is part of a government taskforce for response and recovery following the incident at TFI, and is working with other agencies on the management of environmental issues.

The safety of employees working at the plant, including fire and demolition crews is the paramount consideration in the joint response to the fire.

There are many risks to staff working at a fire affected worksite, including poor lighting, structural integrity of the remaining building, re-ignition of the fire caused by oxygen coming into contact with materials as they are moved, and the trauma caused by the extent of the destruction.

**The safety of staff is paramount and the driving factor behind the prioritisation of the emergency response. The safety of the environment is also paramount to the EPA's response, and staff mobilised immediately to protect the environment from fire water runoff.**



### What is the EPA's role in the emergency response?

As South Australia's environmental regulator, the EPA's role is to ensure TFI complies with the requirements of its *EPA Licence 11649*. Additionally, the 'General Environmental Duty' under Section 25 of the *Environment Protection Act 1993* requires all reasonable and practicable measures be taken to prevent or minimise environmental harm. Due to the critical need to protect the wetland and its endangered species, the EPA has provided specialised technical expertise to undertake urgent recovery work on behalf of TFI to ensure immediate action was undertaken to prevent catastrophic impact to the sensitive wetland environment.

## Protecting the Rocky Gully Wetland and the Murray River

The quick response and action of the EPA, Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources, local residents and local company Spry Earthmovers, prevented damage to the River Murray and the Rocky Gully Wetland.

Approximately 3 million litres of fire water was required to put out the fire, which had run into the channel adjacent to the TFI site. If not stopped, the fire water would have run into the nearby wetland, threatening the integrity of the wetland which is habitat for two nationally protected species of fish.

Staff worked quickly to block the culvert leading from the channel into the wetland (see below) and maintained water supply for the Metropolitan Fire Service (MFS) by installing a pump over the culvert. The water was then able to be recycled by the MFS in their firefighting efforts.

As the fire was being contained, the EPA conducted onsite monitoring to test the water to assess the oxygen and pH levels. This confirmed that the water was not suitable to be released into either the Wetland or the River.

The EPA then negotiated with SA Water to use the adjacent irrigation lots to disperse the water, minimising adverse impact on the aquatic environment.

Pumping was initiated on 10 January 2018 and the EPA will undertake ongoing assessments and flushing to reduce residue within the channel.

The EPA is continuing to monitor the area and is working with other agencies and TFI on effective management of the water canals on the TFI Murray Bridge premises to minimise any potential environmental harm.



*Culvert sealed by the EPA on 4 January 2018 to prevent fire water discharge.*

## Odour coming from the site

Residents may experience an unpleasant smell, however this odour is not harmful to health.

We understand that this may be concerning to some people and thank the community for its patience during this complex process.

All trucks involved in the disposal of the carcasses will be washed out at the landfill after delivery before returning to the TFI site. This will assist in reducing odour in the area.

On hot windy days there is potential for the odour to travel further from the site, and wind direction will also impact on who is affected.

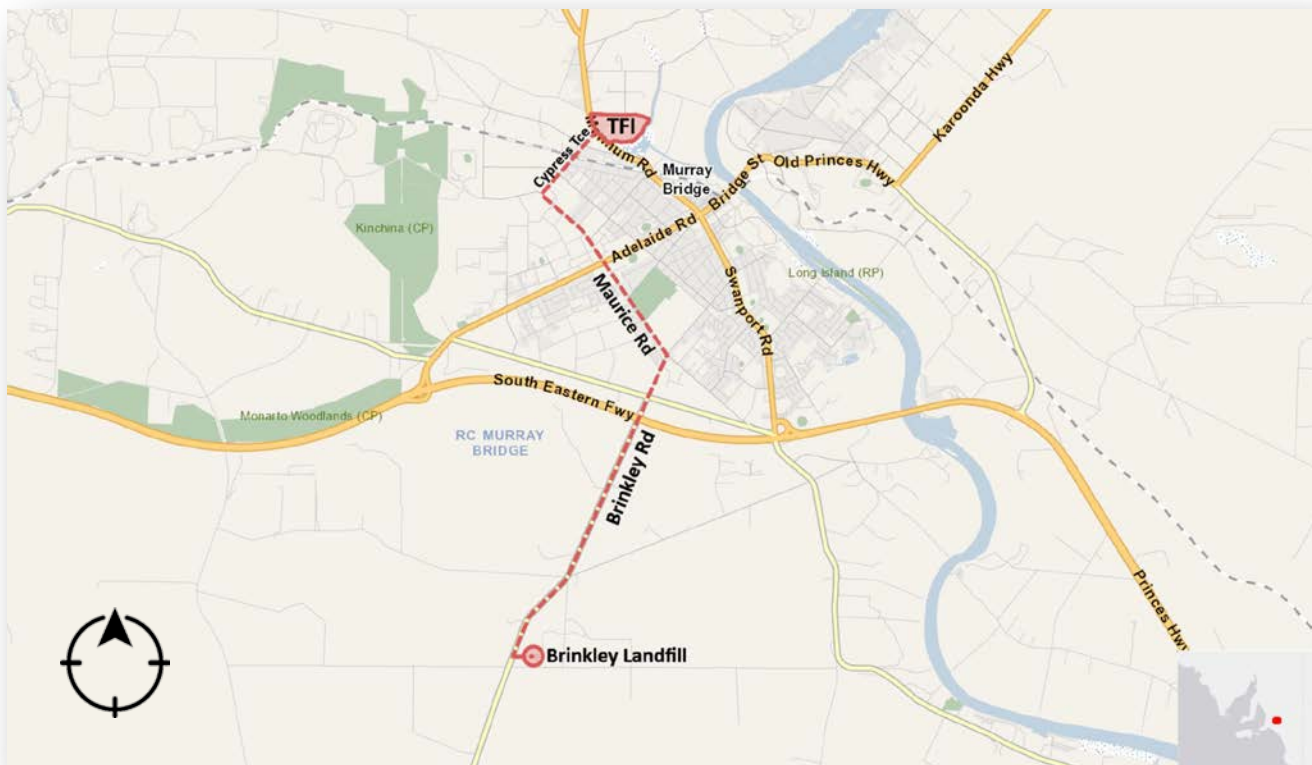
## SA Health advice

SA Health have also advised that odour from the Thomas Foods site could be unpleasant and may be nauseating, but has reassured staff and public that it is not poisonous or toxic.

Any odour is expected to dissipate rapidly once the carcasses have been removed.

A Community Information Centre has been set up at the Murray Bridge Town Hall 13–17 Bridge St, to provide counselling, advice and staff information. Opening hours are 8.30 am – 5.30 pm weekdays.

A hotline (1800 302 787) is also still open for Thomas Food International employees and the broader community to contact the Government with any questions or concerns.



## Proposed transportation route

The EPA is working with Thomas Foods International (TFI) and its contractors for the appropriate removal and transport of the animal carcasses destroyed or spoiled by the fire at its Murray Bridge abattoir.

The material is being transported to a local licensed landfill for disposal in a properly lined and prepared cell. The route currently proposed is southwest along Cypress Terrace, southeast down Maurice Road, then south along Brinkley Road to the Brinkley Landfill.

The EPA will have officers in Murray Bridge and Brinkley to make sure that the transport and disposal complies with the relevant licence conditions to reduce any nuisance, such as odour, that might result.

### Tour Down Under not affected

The transport arrangements for the disposal of the carcasses has taken in to consideration the Tour Down Under event. Contact has been made with the event organisers to ensure that no truck movements will occur during this time.

#### FURTHER INFORMATION

For **further information from the EPA** please contact:

Compliance Branch  
 Environment Protection Authority  
 GPO Box 2607, Adelaide SA 5001  
 Telephone: (08) 8204 2004  
 Email: [engage.epa@sa.gov.au](mailto:engage.epa@sa.gov.au)  
 Website: [www.epa.sa.gov.au](http://www.epa.sa.gov.au)

For **all other information** related to the Thomas Foods International fire please contact:

Community Information Centre  
 Murray Bridge Town Hall  
 13–17 Bridge St  
 8.30 am–5.30 pm weekdays and  
 8.30 am–1 pm Saturday  
 Telephone: 1800 302 787

