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To: Ms Tyhileka Madubela

Committee Section
Parliament of RSA
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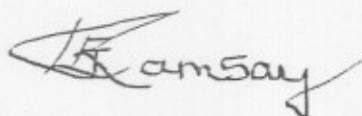
Comments on the South African Weather Service Amendment Bill, 2011

I write this letter to put forward my concerns about the South African Weather Service Amendment Bill, 2011. As a researcher and lecturer specializing in air quality and pollution meteorology, I find certain provisions alarming and am concerned about the limitations that will be placed on my future research and scope for teaching/supervising students.

It is my understanding that Section 30A of the Bill will make it an offence for anyone to issue warnings about severe weather or air pollution without the written permission of the agency. My research focuses on model development to predict air pollution events, particularly in the South Durban Basin. I have an MSc student currently working with a Community Based Organization in South Durban on a model to predict air pollution episodes so that precautions can be taken by sensitive individuals living adjacent to local industries. I am working on an international collaboration that aims to assess local impacts of air pollution in the context of predicted climate changes over the next 50 years. I present my research in student lectures, at academic conferences and at community meetings on a regular basis. I also am contacted regularly by the media for my views on air quality or severe weather events – and possible events in the future. It is clear that the provisions of Section 30A could jeopardize opportunities to publish and present my current research and limit further research if permission from SAWS is not forthcoming.

More fundamentally, I find the proposed provisions a limitation on my academic freedom, my freedom of opinion (section 15), and freedom of expression (section 16 of the Constitution). I find it concerning that academic research in South African should require approval from a government agency, particularly in a field where our history shows that government agencies have been co-opted by big business with little concern for the health and safety of vulnerable communities on the ground. This Bill echoes the provisions of the Secrecy Bill, with Parliament proclaiming the need for increased effectiveness and efficiency of government agencies, while limiting public access to relevant information and quietly closing the door on (and opportunities for) dissenting views.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L Ramsay', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dr Lisa Frost Ramsay

Lecturer

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