

28 July 2003

Legislative Assembly  
Standing Committee on Public Works  
fax (02) 9230 3052

**SUBMISSION for  
INQUIRY INTO ENERGY CONSUMPTION  
IN RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS**

**INTRODUCTION**

My qualifications for making this submission are as follows:-

\*Home-owner, residing in free-standing, single-storey dwelling with free-standing, single-storey garage/workshop, clothes hoist in back garden, home office in spare bedroom, on treed property adjacent treed nature reserve.

\*Resident of the variously-called 'North Ryde Employment Area', "Australia's Silicon Valley", 'Macquarie Transport Corridor'.

Most particularly in the past decade, I have observed the ongoing displacement of traditional single dwellings and their residents, mature trees and ground cover. In their place has come intensive development of the CSIRO/Riverside Corporate Park site, development in progress on Delhi Road including multi-storey serviced apartment accommodation, crematoria at Macquarie (Northern Suburbs) Cemetery duplicating crematoria on the opposite side of the same road, and the spread of multi-storey commercial development such as 'Office Works' on Epping Road.

\*Consumer of electric power only, by necessity as much as by choice, for lighting, cooking, cold-water laundry, refrigeration, water-heating, work, entertainment, and for air-conditioning or air circulation when required by climatic conditions. The only kitchen appliances in regular use are an electric jug and a toaster. A clothes-drier is used only in extended rainy periods, which have not been a recent problem.

\*Victim of computer crashes and brown-outs as a result of power consumption over which I had no influence, resulting in damage to equipment and loss of data, necessitating purchase of uninterruptible power supply unit for computer, generator for real black-outs, countless replacement light globes. (Recent installation of small sub-station in Waterloo Road, North Ryde has provided temporary relief.)

\*Resident of a neighbourhood now containing fewer homes, rather than more, in my immediate vicinity, due to the RTA's compulsory acquisition and subsequent demolition, for M2 Tollway construction, of all dwellings on Pittwater Road north of Epping Road at North Ryde.

Three of the four dwellings which survived this landtake are RTA rental properties, where tenants have little or no say in matters such as choice of energy or choice of heating/cooking facilities. Even in its former state, this neighbourhood had no access to piped gas for heating/cooking although the major pipeline is only meters away.

Large parcels of land acquired/reserved by the RTA for the M2 and its corridor, but not used for that purpose, are earmarked for sale and commercial development as bulky goods warehousing, etc.

\*Resident of an area which now is facing the impacts of 'The Lane Cove Tunnel and

Associated Works', notably including: the fall-out from an unfiltered emission stack 400m from North Ryde/East Ryde in the Lane Cove River Valley; increased traffic noise; increased at-surface vehicle emissions from a further widening of Epping Road and induced additional traffic on Delhi Road, Epping Road and Pittwater Road running from North Ryde to Gladesville. North Ryde residents who will be affected most severely by the widening of Epping Road have been offered double-glazing by the RTA, ensuring increased energy use for air-conditioning.)

Resident also of a river valley system which apparently will suffer the impacts of still more unfiltered emission stacks and at-surface pollution, due to an all or partly tunnelled M2-F3 link. [*"All of the feasible Type A options would mostly be in tunnel and would need to be ventilated through ventilation stacks"* - F3 to Sydney Orbital Link Study Newsletter No. 2 - July 2003]

### ISSUES FOR EXAMINATION

Although appreciating that my surroundings are somewhat atypical in terms of the NSW Government's residential housing strategies, I suggest that many of the issues of interest to the Committee are common to people throughout the Sydney area, i.e.

1. **Changes in annual energy consumption patterns:** Major changes in energy consumption frequently are beyond the influence, and contrary to the choices, of residential consumers. In addition to periodic campaigns by electricity suppliers to increase consumption through purchase of additional home appliances, other NSW Government bodies continue to exacerbate problems of supply by numerous intentional or thoughtless policies.
2. **The implications for energy-providers are obvious.** A pretence of 'punishing' residential home-owners for energy use may increase government revenue, but it will have little impact on consumption in situations where consumers' choices are limited by circumstances and income. (For example, the computer with which I earn the money to pay my electricity bill will not function on cold days unless my home office is heated, or on hot days unless the room is cooled. The times on which I may rely on open windows to warm or cool are dictated by the outdoor air pollution. Electric lighting is as essential to a home office as to a corporate office, although workers at home are less likely to leave the lights, office equipment and air-conditioning in operation when their 'offices' are unattended.
3. **Factors contributing to increased energy use.** A factor which must rate high among residential consumers is cynicism and a feeling of helplessness, engendered by the reality of what NSW Government does rather than what NSW Government says, i.e.
  - (a) Neglecting maintenance and upgrading of the network as evidenced by: the State Treasurer's allegiance to a sell-off of supply facilities; Government's refusal to seriously consider undergrounding power to avoid outages whenever there is rain, wind, or a possum up a pole; last week's sub-station crisis (fire) in the Bankstown area; this morning's news that Government has milked \$2.7 billion from Integral Energy and Energy Australia since 1997 [*Sydney Morning Herald*, 28-7-03, page 4].
  - (b) Encouragement of high-rise housing, requiring constant use of electricity for air, heating, cooling, clothes-drying, lifts, secured access, etc.
  - (c) Negating, due to overshadowing by high-rise, the possible benefits of solar power.
  - (d) Increasing ambient temperature to a level requiring air-conditioning, by replacing open, vegetated ground with paving and buildings.

- (e) Degrading air quality to a level requiring air-conditioning for tightly-closed/sealed-up homes.
- (f) Increasing ambient noise levels through induced traffic increases, to levels requiring double-glazing which in turn requires air-conditioning.
- (g) Mis-interpreting 'user-pays' philosophies, by charging higher tariffs for 'green power'.
- (h) Suggesting that low-income earners may be forced to pay more for electricity, simply because their suburb has become overdeveloped. This concept probably is more political ploy than genuine proposal. If so, it is causing needless anxiety to real people who already are forced to sit in the dark, and to attempt to protect their health by staying in bed on cold days, and sitting in the bath on hot days.
- (i) Condoning regulations which prevent the operation of residential air-conditioning after 10:00 p.m. (Sheer torment in a high-rise, western suburbs unit which has been locked up all day while the residents are at work.)

**4. Current government and industry policies and initiatives.** As indicated, there appear to be more 'policies' working against, rather than for, energy conservation. These extend beyond those directly affecting residential use to the profligate consumption of corporate consumers — empty offices ablaze with light, filled with equipment in stand-by mode, and fully air-conditioned throughout the long hours when they stand empty; 'ego signage' on corporate complexes during times when no one needs to locate them. Initiatives such as identification of power-efficient appliances can produce only a slow and limited decrease in consumption. Few people are inclined to replace appliances which are operating satisfactorily; even when the old fridge dies, cost may be the deciding factor in choosing a secondhand or old-style replacement no better than its predecessor. Government has done little to discover an appropriate means of recycling abandoned white goods, computers, etc. Battery power as an alternative for small appliances is another, largely unaddressed, environmental concern.

## STRATEGIES UNDER CONSIDERATION

**1. Improving design, construction, operational practices.** Local and State Government continue to act as a barrier to innovative, imaginative housing solutions. The insane housing cost spiral also works against experimentation. Buying or building a home is so expensive in itself that few can afford the services of an architect.

As previously suggested, high-rise living is an energy hog, from mandatory use of clothes driers to essential air-conditioning.

There appears to be little hope of controlling the move by developers to promote 'the huge house', which takes up most of its building block and ensures that there is little space for gardens and trees which could provide a degree of natural cooling and shading.

Numerous other urban ailments actively encourage a retreat to indoor living — outdoor ugliness, lack of opportunities for outdoor activity, noise pollution, air pollution, fear of crime, loss of community, etc.

**2. Targets, other quantifiable outcomes.** Of little purpose without first establishing practical means of getting there. Of little purpose for private citizens who are lumbered with targets which do not take their individual circumstances into account.

(a) First, address the easily achievable targets which will make the biggest difference. Get the big end of town to turn off the unnecessary lights.

**3. Product research, new technologies, retrofitting.** By all means, but they must be supported by commercial development, sensible pricing and accessibility to the public. In turn, such innovations are likely to require government support for their developers and subsidies for those who install them.

**4. Consumer awareness and education.** This is failing now for very understandable reasons: price-consciousness, genuine inability to reduce consumption without discomfort or inconvenience, awareness that bigger consumers are showing little commitment.

(a) Address those issues first. Return to educating residential consumers when it can honestly be said that the public and corporate sectors are making progress, and that there are rewards, rather than penalties, for residential consumers who act responsibly.

(b) Ensure that any consumer targets do not disadvantage those who already use minimal electricity for their situation. (Few unit-dwellers cannot reduce consumption by festooning the balcony with laundry or walking ten flights instead of taking the lift. In many cases, low-income earners cannot reduce consumption without ceasing consumption.)

(c) Substance, please — no more motherhood statements and meaningless slogans.

**6. Other strategies and their implementation.** Look within.

(a) Assuming that energy consumption must be contained for both cost and environmental reasons, all public sector players who contribute directly and indirectly to increased consumption must be required by Parliament to improve their performance — landuse planners, road-builders, road transport (with the STA's antiquated bus fleet), and energy authorities (with their fragile, above-ground network of wires) included most particularly.

(b) Cabinet must realise that the money which the 'user pays' for such essentials as electricity (and water) is better invested in the relevant infrastructure than as 'mad money' for other Government expenditures.

(c) Honesty is a good policy, but even if mandated today, it will take quite some time for the public to accept it. For too long, governments of all descriptions at all levels have been blaming anyone other than themselves for water shortage, power shortage, air pollution, traffic congestion, degraded/dangerous public transport, the failing health system, and inadequate care for all those who cannot care for themselves. (We're told to 'dial before you dig', but it is frequently a government contractor who ruptures a gas line or blacks out electricity. We're told that 'the drain is only for the rain', but RTA contractors fill the gutters with grass cuttings and road-mending rubble. We're told to plant trees, but Government projects and the Land & Environment Court rule against them. Water restriction notices suggest a mandatory requirement when in fact they are voluntary . . . and applicable only to private residences. We're told to use public transport when there is none that will get us to work on time.)

## **CONCLUSION - RELATED MATTER**

I wish the Committee well in a difficult and important exercise. It is hoped that its recommendations are good ones — and that on this occasion, they will not be shelved as so often happens when recommendations are at odds with Government's short-term ambitions.

Mrs Diane Michel