

Portfolio Committee No. 2 – Health
Inquiry into the health impacts of exposure to poor levels of air quality
resulting from bushfires and drought

PROFORMA A

41 received, some with individual comments set out below.

Dear Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the ‘Inquiry into the health impacts of exposure to poor levels of air quality resulting from bushfires and drought’.

Each year, almost 5000 Australians die from exposure to air pollution and thousands more suffer serious health issues like stroke, lung cancer and heart disease. And that's without counting the additional exposure to bushfire smoke.

The current air pollution regulatory framework is not strong enough to protect the health of the NSW community from exposure to air pollution.

The vast majority of air pollution in NSW comes from ageing coal-fired power stations and motor vehicles. The NSW Air Emissions Inventory estimates that coal-fired power stations contribute 87% of SO₂ emissions and 52% of NO₂ emissions, as well as 9% of direct PM_{2.5} emissions in the NSW Greater Metropolitan Region (GMR). Power stations also contribute to secondary sulfate particulate levels across the GMR. For example, power station SO₂ produces close to 20% of PM_{2.5} at Richmond in Sydney’s north-west on an annual basis.

The most effective way to reduce the health impacts of air pollution is to clean up these major sources.

There are 8 key actions the government can take to respond to the air pollution crisis and protect the health of the NSW community:

1. The government must dramatically reduce climate emissions, and work with other states to reach the common goal of emissions reduction. If we don’t bush fires will worsen and so will the smoke impact.
2. Understand and inform the community of the full health impacts of exposure to bush fire smoke and how to best protect their health
3. Finalize and implement a Clean Air Strategy for NSW, for implementation 365 days a year, which includes strong measures to reduce industrial pollution as close to zero as possible.
4. Set strong stack emissions limits for coal-fired power stations in line with international standards, which will require operators to install continuous stack monitoring and best practice pollution controls. This will reduce toxic air pollution from power stations by more than 85% and improve health outcomes for the NSW community.
5. Expand NSW air quality monitoring network to areas with particular risks to health from significant air pollution sources, such as at Lake Macquarie and Lithgow.
6. Set strong health-based national air pollution standards to protect health, with an exposure reduction framework in place for continual improvement of the standards.

7. Finalize the review of the Load-Based Licencing (LBL) Scheme, including a load-based licensing fee for the coarse and fine particle pollution emitted by coal mines and associated infrastructure.
8. Commit to further research and policy development with regards to air pollution and the impacts on health.

Thank you for considering my submission.

INDIVIDUAL COMMENTS

Bev Atkinson

This is a MAJOR matter where I live, up and down the Hunter. ALL causes of pollution, illness and distress need to be openly considered. Dust from drought, smoke from bushfire, Fumes and dust from COAL MINING, sulphur and fumes from spontaneous combustion, fugitive gases from underground mining, emissions from mining machinery as well as vehicles, toxic emissions from the coal fired power stations, and badly burnt wood from domestic heating combustion stoves.

The Upper Hunter receives all of the above. When making excuses to continue mining, private fires are often quoted by Government as figuring in a major way.. sorry, no.

Many people I know are suffering from asthma, emphysema, lung cancer and general debility due to the prevailing low quality of the air in the Hunter Valley especially in the vicinity of coal mining. Dust from other sources, smoke from home fires, these are sporadic and they dissipate. The Mining sources just grind on and on, with very little variation apart from what the weather provides.

Now it is unusual to be able to see the view of the distance. It is more usual to note the presence of brown and orange tinged smog veiling the skies and distant hills, near the mines. So pollution affects the visual quality of our daily lives too.

REGULATIONS: Regulations are drafted only as window dressing; enabling the State Government to approve ongoing pollution-creating, destructive industries, by supplying "consent conditions". This is dishonest.

We know that only royalties matter, and mine votes. People are regarded only as taxpayers, and their health is of no consequence. The air quality issue itself is being isolated here. Thus the combined impacts of mining are broken up into separate aspects, to weaken the total case for stopping the lethal advance of the black destruction.

I hope you can see the point of looking at the whole picture of the effect of coal mining, not just the air quality aspects set apart.

Kim Pracy

We are residents living about a 2- 3klm from a power plant. We can't eat many fish that we catch, due to contaminated water in Lake Macquarie & have so many people that have had cancer in our Village, that it seems the averages are way to high

Karen Taylor

I am a full-time carer for my mother so I don't have time to research this information so I am using a template provided by an organisation. But that doesn't diminish the importance I place on this issue or the need for Australia to act NOW to reduce air pollution. Climate change is clearly increasing the amount of air pollution we suffer, so we need to act on this immediately. Coal fired power stations contribute directly to air pollution, but also indirectly by affecting our climate to increase the risk of bushfire smoke and wind blown dust as our ancient soils are blown away in drought. My mother and I and all Australians are suffering from especially this last summer. It cannot be ignored.

Richard Stanford

My wife and I live at the top of Coogee Bay Road, Randwick. We can see the sea at the bottom of the road from our balcony. When the bush fires were burning recently, the smoke reached our position and hung around for several days. We were very concerned for the people living nearer the fires, in Western areas of the city, as the pollution must have been quite extreme, on top of the usual pollution.

Patricia Durman

Over the past few years we have lost three friends and our sister in law to Lung Cancer, we live in Campbelltown and all four of these ladies lived in SW Sydney, they did not smoke, took regular exercise and ate well very rarely eating junk food.

Since the death of our sister in law last year we have been monitoring small particulates and it is very rare when the reading is good, our local heat and air monitoring stations are at Mount Annan which is in the middle of the Australian Botanic Gardens at Mount Annan and so the stations are on top of the Mount and surrounded by grass and trees.

The placement of the stations has ensured that true readings are not taken of the areas where residents live and in the future with the airport at Badgerys Creek, and thousands of new homes air quality and heat will get beyond anything any child should be expected to endure.

A new report Benchmarking Heat Across Campbelltown has proved that once the lush green pastures to the south of the city are covered in dark houses, high rise and shopping centre our children will become sick from the heat and air pollution.

In the sixties, the Macarthur South developers were abandoned because of concerns over air pollution, and the Howard government put the Badgerys Creek airport on hold for the same reason, but the present government has ignored the problems of heat and air pollution.

In the nineties, the Metropolitan Air Quality Study found that this area acts as a funnel and in the evening's pollution filtered out through this region, headed down to Goulburn and then went out to the coast.

All previous air quality reports have been ignored, but this government and we can only expect a higher number of people contracting lung disorders, such as Lung Cancer and Asthma.

Peter Sainsbury

As a retired public health doctor I am particularly concerned about the extremely harmful health effects of air pollution, including air pollution originating from bush fires. It is essential to note that almost 5000 people die prematurely and unnecessarily in Australia every year from air pollution. In itself this is a matter of great concern but it also must be noted that when so many people die of a condition caused by air pollution, many many more people are living with diseases caused by air pollution, for instance cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, and their quality of life is considerably diminished by their illness. In addition, this also affects the families of those afflicted.

The second point to note is that there is no safe level of air pollution. The harmful effects of air pollution begin as soon as people are exposed to polluted air, no matter how low the level of pollution. Consequently, it is essential not simply that 'acceptable' levels of air pollutants be established but rather that every effort must be made to reduce the level of pollutants in the air to the lowest possible levels. It is highly regrettable that the current air pollution regulatory framework is not strong enough to protect the health of the NSW community from exposure to and ill health caused by air pollution.

For a variety of reasons it is essential that maximum effort should be directed to limiting climate change and minimising the risk of bush fires and the air pollution they create. However, I also ask that the Inquiry notes that the vast majority of air pollution in NSW comes from coal-fired power stations and motor vehicles. Air pollution from these two sources must be controlled and reduced as much as possible.

Julie Favell

Requesting that the current AirWatch program in the Blue Mountains and Lithgow be extended after May 2020. Our family only live near Mt Piper Power Station which has been well documented as a cumulative impacted area which borders on our natural areas including Ben Bullen State Forest, Gardens of Stone NP. We breathed the air for 6 weeks whilst the Gospers Mountain fire burned our local areas, we just survived the fire taking our home by 300 metres with sprinklers going 24/7 for weeks. Why is that we do not have a stand alone independent 24/7 monitoring system which would give not only the visitors peace of mind but the local people who live here.

Lithgow is a transition town and one of the targets by our Council is Tourism, this hardly helps our failing town now. People who visit here need to know the air quality in our natural areas which attracts thousands of people every year. Equally preparing now for when coal will go, but that is a way off yet, in the meantime give us security with knowing what our air quality is.

Richard Dudley-Smith

As well as all the following points Nationally there are also numerous State and Local issues. The NSW Govt have pursued a policy of 1950s thinking to try to address congestion issues in

Sydney with the construction and privatisation of the WestCONnex an infrastructure build that will not work. What it will do is induce more vehicles into the CBD. This has been the experience all around the World there can be no argument against this. Even Los Angeles with it's massive highways has conceded that building more roads is a failed policy of addressing congestion and has now switched to constructing 6 new rail lines and building 120 stations as the only solution to the cities congestion. The imperative in all cities is to move people not cars. Not only will WestCONnex not ease congestion, it is being built without filtration in either tunnels or stacks which is criminal. Not only will this massively add to pollution due to induced traffic numbers it will also have major health implications for those using these tunnels and for areas where pollution stacks and tunnel portals are located. Nowhere in the World are tunnels of the lengths being constructed here allowed to be built without 100% full air filtration. The criminal act being perpetrated by the NSW Govt is not filtering; and the reason that this is not being done is because the cost of the health implications have been worked out on forward projections and found to be less than the cost of putting in full filtration as for example has been done in Tokyo. I can only hope that in the years to come when the implications of this dereliction of duty is finally exposed through early deaths and impaired health those affected will take legal action against the perpetrators - Politicians of the present Govt.

Christine Cusbert

I live near the proposed smoke stacks for the M4 at Lilyfield and am very concerned for the health of myself and my neighbours.

Name suppressed

I have been personally affected by nearly 3 months inhalation of bushfire smoke, which caused me to develop smoke induced asthma. I was medically evacuated twice and eventually moved interstate for some time to escape consequences of the bushfire smoke and particle inhalation.

Graeme Batterbury

My partner is a chronic asthmatic, so air quality is a crucial factor in where we go and what we do! Her breathing is the same volume as if I were to always breathe through a straw!!! Try it it is difficult to sustain.

Antony Lewis

In western Sydney as well as the intermittent occasions of bushfire smoke, we currently have significant pollution from the industries of western Sydney and being the vortex of the Sydney air basin swirl. We get the vertical temperature inversions being close to the Blue Mountains range and are less effected by the daily horizontal diurnal coastal flow.

I also wish to add that many of the emissions from industry are not monitored and so while there is a focus on visible particulates the smaller particulate sizes less than PM2.5 are not monitored and many toxins like furans and, benzene.

Western Sydney is known for its higher rates of COPD and respiratory diseases. There needs to be better monitoring at more locations, of more emission types , less averaging and the data should be available live to the residents via a government managed website (not through external consultants)

Pauline Lockie

As an elected Councillor at Inner West Council, I am also particularly concerned about the impact on local air quality due to the WestConnex project. This tollway has impacted air pollution throughout Sydney's inner west due to increased traffic on surface roads, dust and other pollutants released from construction sites, and the unfiltered pollution stacks that release pollutants from the motorway tunnels. The proposed Western Harbour Tunnel will add significantly to all of these issues.

Stephen Dewar

I am making this submission on behalf of Lakemac Sustainable Neighbourhood Alliance. Lake Macquarie has a major problem with the Coal Ash Dams at Eraring and Vales Point Power Stations beside the station's air pollution and leaking of heavy metals into the lake. Long term solution needed to remove these coal ash dams!
