

10 July 2020

The Hon. Greg Donnelly (Chair)
Portfolio Committee No. 2 - Health
NSW Legislative Council

Dear Mr Donnelly,

Re: Question on Notice - Inquiry into Health Impacts of Exposure to Poor Levels of Air Quality Resulting from Bushfires and Drought

The following was taken as a question on notice during the hearing I participate in on 10 June 2020:

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Ms Goldman, in your introduction you referred to modelling involving 445 people who you said died due to smoke exposure. Can you tell us a bit about that modelling and how you reached that figure?

Ms GOLDMAN: Yes. That was not modelling that we undertook. That was modelling that was published in The Medical Journal of Australia. I will double-check that with you—modelling that was led by Professor Fay Johnston. They looked at what exposure to smoke—what the health impacts were both in terms of mortality and also in terms of emergency care.

Clarification re publication and modelling numbers:

A recently published study undertook a preliminary evaluation of the health burden from the increased particulate matter in Eastern Australia. It estimates the bushfire smoke was responsible for 417 excess deaths, more than 1,000 cardiovascular hospitalisations, more than 2,000 respiratory hospitalisations and 1,300 presentations to the Emergency Department for asthma during the 19 weeks of continuous fires.

Source: Borchers, Palmer, Bowman, Morgan, Jalaludin and Johnston 2020, Unprecedented smoke-related health burden associated with the 2019-20 bushfires in eastern Australia, Medical Journal of Australia. Doi: 10.5694/mja2.50545

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.5694/mja2.50545>

The results in the above publication were preliminary estimates. The analysis has been extended to include SA, TAS and WA, and to go up to 31 March 2020, but this has yet to be published. Fay

Johnston (one of the authors) did share some of these more recent estimates which suggest estimates of 445 premature deaths in the hearing with the Royal Commission and which I referred to in my opening statement.

I also enclose a marked up copy of the transcript where I have indicated words where the transcript marked them as inaudible.

Please let us know if there are any further questions.

Yours sincerely,

Michele Goldman
Chief Executive Officer
Asthma Australia