



Our ref: DOC23/964134

Dr Amanda Cohn MLC  
Chair  
Portfolio Committee No. 2 - Health  
Parliament of NSW

By email: [portfoliocommittee2@parliament.nsw.gov.au](mailto:portfoliocommittee2@parliament.nsw.gov.au)

Dear Chair

I refer to Portfolio Committee No. 2's Inquiry into the current and potential impacts of gold, silver, lead and zinc mining on human health, land, air and water quality in New South Wales and to the hearing on Friday 27 October 2023.

**Response to questions on notice**

Please find enclosed the EPA's response to the question on notice.

**Transcript correction request, clarification of my evidence and additional information**

Thank you for the opportunity to review the uncorrected transcript. I seek a few corrections to the transcript in order to provide clarity on some of my evidence I provided at the hearing. This information is enclosed.

Yours sincerely

**TONY CHAPPEL**  
**Chief Executive Officer**

Encl

13 November 2023

**Portfolio Committee No. 2's Inquiry into the current and potential impacts of gold, silver, lead and zinc mining on human health, land, air and water quality in New South Wales**

**EPA response to questions on notice (page 67 of the transcript)**

**Question 1:**

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: In answering one of the questions a bit earlier, you referred to capacity issues, from time to time. You may not be in a position to do so or be authorised to do so, but I'd be interested to know what, in general terms, they might be, and, perhaps, are they regularly cyclical or are they more irregular than that? Because, at the end of this inquiry, we're pulling the evidence together and we'll be making recommendations in our report back to government and to the Minister for consideration. In general terms, if the evidence bears it out, matters of capacity—pinch points—might help inform our thinking.

TONY CHAPPEL: Generally, after hours is when those constraints have been most evident. I think we're often relying on contractor services there that might not deliver the service in the way we'd prefer it to be delivered, so we're reviewing those arrangements. I'm happy to take the broader question on notice and give you a considered response.

**Answer 1:**

The NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) capacity to respond to incidents is greater during daytime business hours. We have systems and processes in place to receive, triage and respond to environmental incidents quickly during daytime business hours. Environmental incidents are screened at several points to ensure reports of significant incidents are actioned as quickly as possible. This includes a Duty Incident Advice Coordinator role which is the EPA's single point of contact for emergency services in NSW and operates 24/7.

The EPA maintains a capacity to respond to incidents outside daytime business hours through an afterhours incident service. The focus of this service is on incidents with the potential for immediate and significant impacts on human health and the environment. This service is supported by a contracted service provider that receives reports of pollution incident by telephone, triages them based on criteria set by the EPA, and refers significant environmental incidents to the EPA officer for action.

As with other agencies responding to incidents, the EPA's capacity to respond is influenced by factors including the volumes of incoming calls to the EPA's contracted service provider, the number and significance of incidents being responded to by the EPA's afterhours incident service officers at the time and their geographical location. Responses can also be impacted technological disruptions.

An important element of the EPA's framework for responding to incidents both within and outside daytime business hours is the escalation processes in place to support responsiveness and to allow scaling up of resources when required for major incidents.

The EPA has identified that there have been delays in the after-hours call centre answering calls during periods of high call volumes. The EPA is working on a project to modernise and improve the operation of the call centres. This project will be completed by 1 July 2024 and may require additional resources.