

INQUIRY INTO THE PERFORMANCE OF THE NSW EPA

Questions on Notice to Hunter Councils from the Public Hearing held in Newcastle,
November 10, 2014

1. Dr MEHREEN FARUQI:

You note in your submission that Lake Macquarie Council has been lobbying unsuccessfully for several years for the EPA to install air quality monitoring stations across the region.

Can you explain why the council has been lobbying for that and why there has not been any success?

Lake Macquarie City Council response:

Air pollutant emissions for the City of Lake Macquarie are ranked among the highest in the NSW Greater Metropolitan Region (NSW Environment Protection Authority, 2008). Significant emissions sources in the City and surrounds include two operating coal-fired power stations (Eraring, and Vales Point power stations), 11 mining operations (including quarries and coal mining with related operations such as mineral washing, handling, and rail and road coal transport infrastructure), and a high dependence on motor vehicles. The City's air quality may also be affected by emissions sources from surrounding LGAs, which include coal-fired power stations; coal mines; coal transport and handling facilities; road, air and sea transportation; and agricultural activities.

Although the City is host to a range of significant pollution emission sources, currently there is no public ambient air quality monitoring station (AQMS) in the City, and therefore, the ambient air quality is unknown. Ambient air quality is inferred from surrounding areas (largely from the AQMS' in the City of Newcastle and Wyong) and monitoring at premises licensed under the Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997.

The City is located in the Lower Hunter air quality region. This region includes the City of Newcastle, which has three (3) State supported AQMS (at Wallsend, Newcastle, and Beresfield) and Wyong Shire, which has one (1) State supported AQMS.

While the National Environment Protection (Ambient Air Quality) Measure (NEPM) provides an algorithm that dictates the number of AQMS required per region, it also includes a caveat, stating *"additional performance monitoring stations may be needed where the pollutant levels are influenced by local characteristics such as topography, weather or emission sources"*. Council considers that, given the significant number of pollution sources in the City and the lack of AQMS relevant to the City, Lake Macquarie City should be prioritised for an AQMS. This stance should also be relevant for other local government areas with similar air pollution concerns.

Has the EPA given any formal responses to LMCC about why they will not fund this program?

As noted, Council has been lobbying, for several years, for a State supported AQMS in the City. While these attempts have been unsuccessful, it is noted that a State supported monitoring station has been commissioned in Wyong Shire (commencing operations in late 2012), to the south of the City of Lake Macquarie. It is Council's understanding that the Office of Environment and Heritage

(which at the time included both the current EPA and OEH) intended the Wyong AQMS to monitor ground level pollution relevant to the City of Lake Macquarie.

Council maintains its position that a State-supported AQMS is relevant for the City. Lake Macquarie City has a complex airshed, comprising of Lake Macquarie – one of the largest coastal saltwater lagoons in Australia, the Wattagan Mountain Range, and over 30 km of coastline. Further, large parts of the City are prone to temperature inversions in winter months. Council has commissioned air quality modelling that shows the predicted extent of pollutant movement throughout the City, and where pollution is expected to exceed the health based thresholds defined in the NEPM. It is important to note that, for one round of modelling where extensive ground level pollution was observed around Eraring Power Station, and a mining cluster in Teralba, pollutant movement was not predicted to traverse to the location of the Wyong AQMS. This suggests that the Wyong AQMS may not adequately assess ambient ground level air pollution levels in the City of Lake Macquarie.

2. The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:

In regard to the air monitoring stations across the region, does your organisation have a view about where those stations actually should be placed to produce the standard of monitoring that you are looking for?

Hunter Council's response:

Complex meteorological modelling would be required to identify the appropriate sites for public AQMS, to capture industry sources and the effects of temperature inversions. Further investigation will be required by the Office of Environment and Heritage, consistent with AQMS siting requirements presented in the National Environment Protection (Ambient Air Quality) Measure (NEPM).

3. The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: As an organisation, does Hunter Councils have any concerns about coal dust, or concerns about the new terminal T4 coming on-line?

As outlined in the attached submission - Port Stephen's Council made a number of comments on the potential impacts of the T4 proposal on the community as they relate to both noise and air quality impacts from this proposal.

In relation to air quality, PSC's concerns relate to the predicted additional exceedances of cumulative air quality criteria for this Project and a stated position that particulate levels should be reduced given the potential public health risk as well as community concern around this issue.

(See attachment)

**4. Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Does Hunter Councils have a view on how to address coal dust pollution?
For example, do you believe that coal wagons should be washed and covered?**

Hunter Council's response:

Councils of the region have, at this stage, not developed a collective position on the matter of washing and covering coal wagons.