

**Submission
No 7**

INQUIRY INTO HEALTH IMPACTS OF AIR POLLUTION IN THE SYDNEY BASIN

Organisation:

Name: Dr Christopher Clarke

Position:

Telephone:

Date Received: 28/07/2006

Subject:

Summary

July 25 2006

The Director
General Purpose Standing Committee No 2
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000

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SELECT COMMITTEE

SNOWY HYDRO

Dear Sir

Re: Inquiry into the Health Impacts of Air Pollution in the Sydney Basin.

I accept the invitation of the Hon Patricia Forsythe MLC, Committee Chair in her latter to me dated 16 June 2006 to make a submission to the Inquiry.

I am a Consultant Thoracic Physician in private practice. I do not represent any organization and I am not interested in the politics of the issue. What I am interested in is endeavouring to ensure that the people of Sydney can breathe in air that is clean, and as healthy as is practicable within the constraints of the economy. I believe it is entirely legitimate therefore for a person practicing in my speciality to have a view on this issue because anything that might cause or aggravate lung disease is a concern to people in my discipline. Measures to prevent that disease must be made known to people who determine policy in order for change to occur. I regard this as an appropriate forum to do this.

No political party is exempt from criticism in this area. The environmental fiasco surrounding the Albury by-pass is a good example. The major parties were involved in this unfortunate episode.

I have no resources at my disposal to prepare a detailed submission supported by appropriate references.

Air Pollution.

Anyone who looks at or washes their curtains will understand that there is air pollution in Sydney. Look at the curtains or the colour of the water at the end of the wash. This is what the lungs have to cope with, breath after breath ad infinitum. The upper respiratory tract does a great job filtering out the large particles. Unfortunately, the smaller invisible particles escape this protective mechanism and get down into the actual lungs.

The effects of air pollution can be either acute or chronic. The acute symptoms should be regarded in a similar manner to the way old miners used canaries. They indicate pollution is excessive. Unfortunately they are dismissed as trivial. Their significance is also misunderstood. The chronic problems which develop over time are due to the smaller particles. A short study of the effects of pollution will only pick up the acute and perhaps temporary symptoms. A long term study will be required to pick up the chronic effects.

I submit that these studies are not needed in Sydney. The knowledge is there; all we need to do is apply this. The situation is relatively simple. Zero pollution levels equal no lung disease. Any level above zero is associated with some problems in some people. The higher the level the greater the likelihood of lung problems in increasing numbers.

Safe or threshold values or levels have been set for the various constituents of the pollution. The levels are a compromise. The factors that might contribute to the compromise can be illustrated as follows. The acceptable levels in the US are higher than Australia which are higher than Europe.

The main contribution to air pollution in Sydney (with industry disappearing) comes from road traffic. Go to China to see the effects of industry. The people most affected are the young and the old. One has to accept that motor vehicles are here to stay; that our economy and policy appears to be in favour of them over public transport for people and freight then pollution is here to stay. Efforts to reduce it such as clean fuel, efficient engines will be negated by increased traffic and particularly increased congestion. Increased congestion renders the efficient engines much less efficient.

Road transport operators, confronted with increased costs will, almost certainly, reduce engine maintenance which will result in increased pollution. They know the chances of them being caught is minimal.

If the Government is going to continue the madness of building more tunnels without filtration then the environmental impact statement must reflect this. Turning to the Albury By-Pass; the environmental impact statement dealt in great detail with the effect on flora and fauna but treated human beings with contempt.

As a minimum a pollution footprint needs to be presented. The likely pollution plume will have to be calculated for the area surrounding the unfiltered stack in terms of pollution levels at various distances from the stack in the varying climatic conditions likely to be experienced. The presence of day care centers, schools, centers for the elderly, hospitals and so on in the area will then have to be taken into account. The present practice of extrapolating from other sites or other centers is totally inadequate and not satisfactory. People at the extremes of life are probably more sensitive.

I will be prepared to speak to this submission.

Yours faithfully



Christopher W Clarke

References.

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8. M4 East Community update October 2004. Supplied because of particular reference to air quality and schools.