

INQUIRY INTO HEALTH IMPACTS OF AIR POLLUTION IN THE SYDNEY BASIN

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Telephone:
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Subject:

Summary



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4 August 2006

The Director
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney 2000 NSW
gpscno2@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Director

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

Warringah Council is concerned about the health impacts of air pollution. The Council looks forward to hearing the outcomes of the NSW Legislative Council's public inquiry into the Health Impacts of Air Pollution. Warringah has a number of concerns regarding the impacts of air pollution on health and the lack of data on the air quality in Warringah.

WARRINGAH POPULATION

The Health impacts from air pollution are especially a concern for the Warringah community as the Council area houses a community which is older than the Sydney Statistical Division average, as reported in the 2001 Census. The major differences in age structure between Warringah Council area and the Sydney Statistical Division is the higher percentage of persons aged 70-84 years.

ACCESS TO AIR QUALITY INFORMATION

No specific information is available about the levels of air pollution on the Northern Beaches. This lack of information in itself is of concern. The EPA monitoring site closest to the Northern Beaches is Lindfield on the North Shore. This means that at best the Northern Beaches region is relying on assumptions and extrapolations about the air quality data in the area and at worst the issue is not being considered at all.

While air quality data is available on the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) website, the Regional Pollution Index (RPI) trends are not clearly presented. It is hard for Councils to quickly gather a picture of the state of air quality in their region or local area and the long-term trends without drilling into the data stored and extrapolating conclusions. It would greatly assist Council and the public if this information was tabulated and averages provided.

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1906 - 2006

Air Quality data and trends in air quality data seem to be considered and presented separately. There are numerous studies undertaken which monitor and report on the status of air quality in various regions, such as that undertaken by the DEC and the CSIRO. However, this data is presented separately to reports which make conclusions and recommendations about the effects on public health, such as those commissioned by public health authorities and undertaken by academics. It appears that while there have been numerous research projects the findings are not applied to reality; and that relevant and applied recommendations are not made. The data and research available on air quality is dense and inaccessible to the local community and local decision-makers.

AIR QUALITY IN WARRINGAH

The Metropolitan Air Quality Study (MAQS), which was conducted by the NSW EPA in 1996 showed that air pollutants are transported within and between regions. There is a reasonable amount of industry in Warringah which impacts air quality, and the MAQS study showed that the air over Western Sydney, which is often of poor quality, is drained to the sea across the northern beaches.

The study also shows that the air from the Lower Hunter, which can also be poor quality due to heavy industry located there, is drained out to sea and then directed back to Sydney in a north-easterly sea breeze over the northern beaches. North-north-easterly gradient winds were found to transport emissions from the lower Hunter region across the northern beaches towards the Sydney region during the afternoon. The study further found that elevated emissions originating in the Hunter Valley may be transported on to Sydney overnight and mixed in through the morning. This recycled polluted air moving across the Northern Beaches may be having adverse effects on the health of the local community.

AIR QUALITY ISSUES

Issues, which adversely affect the air quality within Warringah, include the lack of public transport to and within the area which has led to a dependency on motor vehicles. The 2001 census showed that over 56% of residents drive motor vehicles to work. Motor vehicles are a major source of carbon monoxide, suspended particles, NO_x and ROCs. An analysis of the transport modes used to get to work by residents of Warringah Council area compared to the Sydney Statistical Division revealed a number of differences (Census 2001). The most significant of these were the lower share of people who came to work by train, the higher percentage of people who came to work by bus and the higher proportion of people who came to work by car as drivers.

There are no train or tram lines in existence across the entire SHOROC region, which includes Pittwater, Warringah, Manly and Mosman local government areas. This means that buses are the most common form of public transport in Warringah, with a much higher average than Sydney. The 2001 Census showed that over 13% of Warringah residents caught the bus to work compared to the Sydney average of 5.4%. The Council believes LPG or low greenhouse gas emission fuels should be used on all buses on the northern beaches. This would greatly reduce the impact of road-based transport on air quality in the area and the associated health effects.

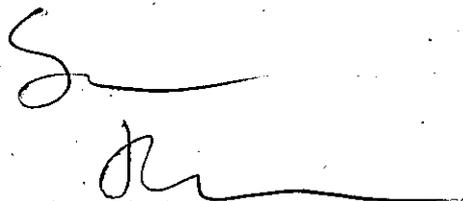
There are a number of industrial premises in the Warringah Council area. These industries may impact on the air quality of the northern beaches. Council undertook an education campaign with local industry, entitled "The Business of Air Quality" with a grant from the EPA. This project worked with local businesses to reduce air pollution and developed standards and guidelines for small businesses.

There are numerous wood fired heaters used across Warringah. The MAQS found that solid fuel home heating is a major source of TSP especially in winter. Council undertakes back-burning and hazard reduction burning which, although efforts are made to minimise, affects air quality.

We trust you will consider the issues raised in this submission, as air quality issues are a growing area of interest in Warringah. Studies have shown that air pollution can lead to premature death, and it is therefore of key importance that air pollution information is available in an accessible and easily understood format. The data should be easily applied to policy and recommendations about health effects.

Should you have any enquiries, please contact Julia Ryan on 9942 2548.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'S Blackadder', written over a horizontal line.

Stephen Blackadder
GENERAL MANAGER