

**Submission
No 36**

INQUIRY INTO HEALTH IMPACTS OF AIR POLLUTION IN THE SYDNEY BASIN

Organisation: Planning Institute Australia
Name: Mr Anthony Newland
Position: President (NSW Division)
Telephone:
Date Received: 18/08/2006

Subject:

Summary



16 August 2006

www.nswplanning.org.au

ABN 9973 1133 540

The Hon Patricia Forsythe MLC,
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2
Legislative Council
Chair of the Inquiry into health impacts of
air pollution in the Sydney Basin

C/- Michael Phillips
Principal Council Officer – Committees
Legislative Council
NSW Parliament
Email: Michael.Phillips@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Mrs. Forsythe,

Inquiry into health impacts of air pollution in the Sydney Basin

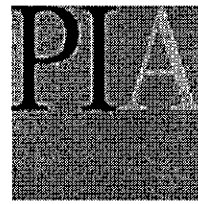
PIA NSW represents over 1400 members in NSW. The attached submission has been prepared (mainly by voluntary effort) by a working party and based upon input from members and individual planners.

We wish to work positively to achieve improvement and a way forward that will serve government and the planning profession well into the future. We look forward to discussions regarding our submission and the way forward in the near future.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anthony Newland', written in a cursive style.

Anthony Newland
President
Planning Institute Australia (NSW Division)



Planning
Institute
Australia
New South Wales
Division

Submission in Response to an Enquiry into the
Health Impacts of Air Pollution in the Sydney
Basin

by the

General Purpose Standing Committee No.2

NSW Government, Legislative Council

Planning Institute of Australia NSW Division August 2006

PREAMBLE

Submission made by:

The Planning Institute of Australia, NSW Division (PIA NSW),
Suite 67, Level 4, 89-97, Jones Street, Ultimo. NSW 2007,
Telephone (02) 9280 2121, Fax (02) 9281 0648

Purpose of the submission:

- This submission is made by the New South Wales Division of the Planning Institute of Australia, PIA in response to an invitation by the Legislative Council of the New South Wales Government. It is intended to bring to the attention of the General Purposes Standing Committee Number 2, the planning implications of air pollution in relation to current proposals to support major land releases for home construction in North West and South West Sydney.
- At the time of this submission the office bearers of the NSW Division are: Anthony Newland (President), Julie Bindon, Gregory Woodhams (Vice Presidents), Monique Roser (Past President), Tim Bainbridge, David Hartman, Stephen McMahon, Peter Jensen, Tony McNamara, Christopher Pratt, Patricia Shantz, Roderick Simpson, James Lette, Marcus Rowan, David Winterbottom, Philip Graus, Bruce McDonald and Brett Whitworth (Division Committee Members).

Information

- The Planning Institute of Australia, PIA is a voluntary subscription-based member organization having an Australia wide membership of 4614 planners and a further component of 265 overseas members.
- The New South Wales Chapter of the PIA has 1419 members located both in Sydney and regional New South Wales.

1 INTRODUCTION

In December 2004, the State Government announced its intention to create two new Growth Centres in the North West and South West Sydney and this was followed by the necessary planning work required to prepare relevant plans and controls to achieve that end. Eighteen months later, an enquiry into what might well be regarded as a key design input to this decision by the Government, is now to be conducted. This enquiry relates to the potential health impacts of air pollution in the Sydney Basin.

While the terms of reference for this enquiry appear to direct attention to the medical and chemical aspects of pollution, such issues are considered by the Planning Institute to have significant impacts on the suitability of locations for housing and are accordingly of mature importance as planning issues to be considered in a social and economic context as well as the purely medical arena.

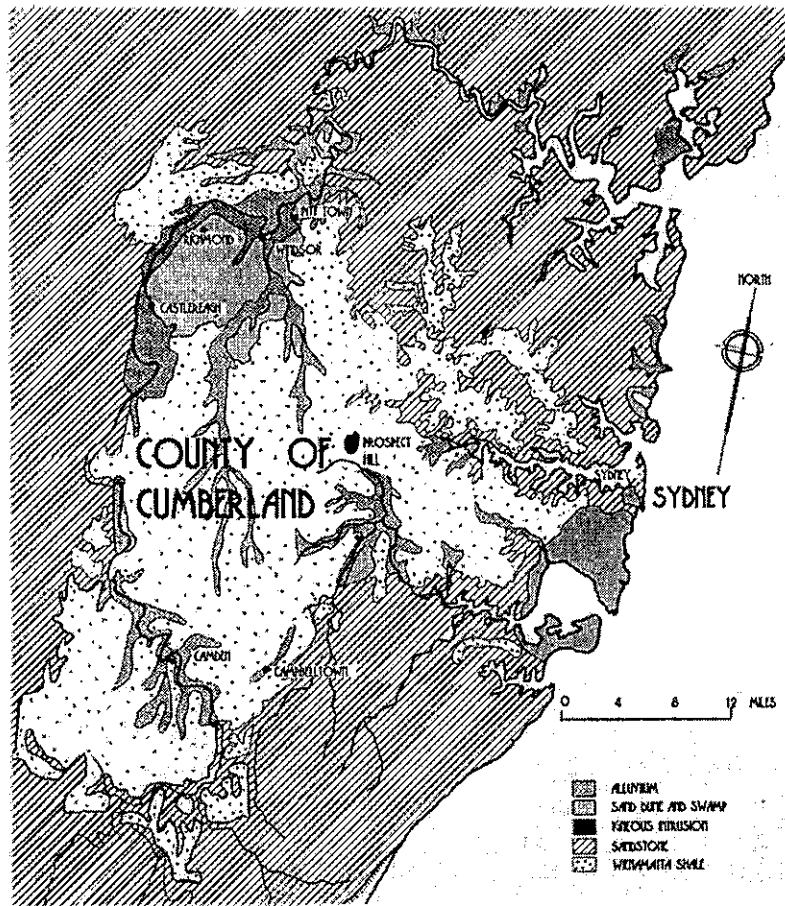
For this reason, while not asserting the possession of necessary medical or biochemical expertise that would appear to be fundamental to the Committee's enquiry, the Planning Institute believes it is not too late to make comment on the planning implications of decisions that have already been made and would appear unlikely to be changed. Most particularly this is seen as likely to be the case because of the ongoing demand for additional housing associated with population growth and demands by the housing industry for land release that have yet to be met. To that extent, the Planning Institute considers that invitation by the State Government is consistent with being asked to respond to the onrush of a cart firmly placed before the horse that is propelling it.

In this general context, while concerned with the attention to a strategic issue as such a late stage, the Planning Institute wishes to indicate its firm support for planning approaches embodied in the recently released Metro-Strategy. This is the case, despite substantial reservations as to certain assumptions relating to population growth and urban land capacity to accept new housing development upon which the current plan appears to be based.

2 BACKGROUND TO THE POLLUTION ISSUE

For a considerable number of years, concern with pollution and the microclimatic characteristics of Western Sydney was the basis for inhibiting land release in that part of the Sydney basin. In particular, the results of the South Creek Study, which considered the air quality issues in detail, is understood to have been the basis for the abandonment of land release proposals in South Western Sydney some 10 years ago.

Why this part of Sydney should be subject to such atmospheric problems is made clear when reference to the geological map attached is made. Evidently the Sydney basin constitutes an area of land bounded by the Blue Mountains to the west and is roughly the shape of a Spanish wine flask: ideally shaped to capture polluted air when temperature inversions apply as they do from time to time.



Source: Jeans

Figure 01 Geology of the Cumberland Plain

As a natural function of the topography of the Cumberland Plain, air movement from the east tends to generate stagnant pools of polluted air which form at the western end of the plain and in particular in the south western part of the Sydney basin as can be seen located in **Figure 01** above.

As the principal source of pollutants, exhaust from petrol-driven and diesel vehicles, is located at the eastern end of the Cumberland Plain, this material tends to be pumped in a westerly direction by the prevailing north westerly moving winds where it is trapped by the surrounding topographic features and particularly the age of the Blue Mountains along the course of the Hawkesbury/Nepean river.

More recent studies of atmospheric conditions in Sydney appear to indicate a general reduction in pollution. However it also appears that two pollution elements, ozone and diesel particulates, can still exceed health standards established by the National Environmental Protection Agency. The situation has been suggested to relate to the occurrence of health problems in the western

parts of the Sydney Region and particularly asthmatic and lung related problems, including cancer.

3 THE WESTERN AREA RELEASE PROGRAMME

As earlier noted, the decision to revive development proposals and land release for the north-west and south-west parts of the Cumberland Plain was announced in December of 2004. Since that time, extensive work by the relevant State Government planning department has seen the creation of extensive documentation to describe the proposed land release areas and associated urban development. In addition, a Planning Commission has been established to oversee the creation of these new urban regions.

Following the release of these regional plans for Western Sydney, the State Government has now provided a metro-strategy which appeared in December of 2005. Again this might be seen as an instance of the "cart preceding the horse". That notwithstanding, the Planning Institute strongly supports the creation of planning work of the complexion of the Metro-strategy as a counterpoint to the torrent of word based strategy documents that have appeared since 1969 when these Sydney Region Outline Plan was made public.

What remains to be clarified in all this current documentation is the emergence of a comprehensive transportation strategy that will respond to the land use decisions that have already been made. It is inferred that the concentration on a number of commercial centres as City places, to be redeveloped at significantly higher densities than currently exist, represents a critical component of such a nascent transportation strategy. It is entirely relevant that these chosen city centres are located on the existing rail system. Further, as discussed in the planning documents, a significant element of the location of the north-west and south-west housing areas was an association with an expansion of the rail system to serve these places.

Given the clear relationship of atmospheric pollution with the incidence of vehicular use, including cars and trucks, any change to the transportation network intended to support the western development areas is likely to have consequences relating to physical health.

As has been revealed in the press and in recent government exposure documents, the intended rail access link to the south-west has now been deferred for a number of years and no date has apparently been set for the construction of the line running to the north-west in the direction of Richmond. It is understood that recent transportation efforts have been turned to maximising the accessibility of the intended western region development areas by means of an express bus system. Bus movements would focus on the new regional city centres of Liverpool and Parramatta which in turn would be expected to generate a significant increase in jobs with a concurrent impact on reducing long-distance commuting particularly towards the east and to the Sydney CBD.

Despite the impact of increasing fuel prices, the Planning Institute see this approach as intrinsically problematic while ever the improvement in public

transportation is allowed to follow demand from the commuting public and usually many years later.

As representative of this problem, it is understood that in the new residential parts of Baulkham Hills local government area, which forms a part of the anticipated north-west corridor of residential growth, at present over 90 per cent of work journeys occur by car and in the absence of suitable public transportation to provide a substitute means of access.

In this general context, the Planning Institute has come to the conclusion that the control of air pollution in the western part of Sydney is likely to be a direct consequence of the extent to which the public transportation network to this part of the Cumberland Plain is developed in response to demand.

4 CONCLUSIONS AND SUBMISSION

As earlier acknowledged, atmospheric pollution problems appear to have waned in recent years although certain components, ozone and diesel particulates, remain an issue and occur in the exceedance of the relevant health standards and on a sufficient number of occasions annually to remain a concern. In this context, it is acknowledged that the removal of lead from petrol has had a major beneficial impact on the quality of air quality in the Sydney basin.

However, the decision to develop the north-west and south-west parts of the Cumberland Plain has been posited on the expansion of public transportation routes to provide access and the control of car usage for commuting purposes. Recent moves to either defer or abandon certain transportation proposals involving heavy rail are seen as having inevitable consequences for the level of atmospheric pollution and consequential impacts on health in the intended development areas.

In this regard, while acknowledging the inappropriateness of commentary on medical and health-related issues by the Planning Institute, the consequential impacts on areas planned for substantial development for housing purposes is seen as very much an issue for its concern and therefore an appropriate basis for commentary on issues that do form an element of its professional expertise.

Finally, the Planning Institute of Australia, New South Wales Division, acknowledges the opportunity to make a submission to the General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2 of the Legislative Council of the New South Wales Government in relation to the issue of air pollution.