

**INQUIRY INTO HEALTH IMPACTS OF EXPOSURE TO
POOR LEVELS OF AIR QUALITY RESULTING FROM
BUSHFIRES AND DROUGHT**

Name: Name suppressed
Date Received: 13 March 2020

Partially
Confidential

My name is .

My address is St Peters. I am 67 years old.

I want to let you know about the problems I, and some neighbours my own age and older, experienced during the extended period of smoke pollution from November 2019 through January 2020..

Here in St Peters we have suffered from the air pollution caused by the construction first of the WestConnex, Stage 2, the new M5 over the past three years and more recently the Metro Dive Site in Marrickville, only 500m from my home.

The WestConnex M5 New - Air Quality Monitoring sites have provided information about the air pollution for the past 12 months so we are well aware of the levels of particulate matter (PM) pollution in our immediate vicinity even before the massive increase across the city from the bushfires. These levels (from the construction works) were often higher and sometimes much higher than the national standard levels.

PM pollution levels in St Peters are dangerously high and exacerbated by the WestConnex construction work. This means that residents have already had their general respiratory health impaired. This was reported to the Legislative Council Inquiry into the Impact of the WestConnex Project and commented on in the final report (see Chapter 4) and was the subject of recommendations 12, 13 and 14.

The bushfires smoke caused these levels of PM pollution to skyrocket and the effects of the bushfire smoke pollution on top of existing levels of particulate matter exacerbated the effects on the health of residents.

I am asthmatic but usually my asthma is quite mild. However my use of both preventative and relieving medication in November and December 2019 and January 2020 had to be significantly increased. I am usually well able to manage my asthma but I had to visit my gp on several occasions, a not insignificant cost not only to myself but also to the national health budget. I do not own a car, and normally walk or cycle about my daily business. I struggled to do my shopping and even visit the doctor because walking and cycling exacerbated my asthma causing wheezing, coughing and breathlessness.

I was forced to spend far more time at home, and was unable to get my normal level of exercise. This caused social isolation and loss of fitness, not healthy for someone of my age.

My home is more than a century old and it was impossible to keep the smoke out. In summer, I normally close up the house in the day to keep out the heat and open up at night to let in the cool air. However the smoke levels forced me to keep the house closed at all times.

Smoke levels outside prevented me from walking or cycling to cooler refuges such as the library or cinema. I was also unable to go swimming not only because I had been advised to avoid exercise but also because of the impossibility of travelling to the pool or beach.

My neighbour across the road has an illness which means she has oxygen at home. This was not sufficient and she was hospitalised several times during those smoky months. I saw the ambulance come for her several times and her husband told me it was because she was having trouble breathing.

Other neighbours who would normally walk to our local shops (about 500m distant) became dependant on the community bus service.

It was difficult to do the washing because when taken of the line the supposedly clean clothes were stinking of smoke.

ToR 2 a,b,c.

We need accurate, local real-time monitoring of pollution levels and access to the data so we can plan when to go outside..

The government must address the sources of pollution not only those caused by bushfires but such as pollution from vehicle and construction as these undermine public health. Australia's standard for vehicle emissions is well below the European standard. The NSW government must put pressure on the federal government to adopt the European standard and start providing incentives to car owners to upgrade to less polluting vehicles. Improving air quality through reducing vehicle emissions, moving to eliminate diesel engines, encouraging use of electric vehicles with appropriate infrastructure and replacing the current bus fleets with electric buses would lower the air pollution and improve public health, and make us more resilient. Future dreadful bushfire seasons and their smoke pollution would be less harmful if the population's general health was not already impaired by the poor quality air many of us have to endure.

Most face masks do not stop PM 2.5 pollution and are very uncomfortable to wear for any length of time especially in hot weather. And PM2.5 is the dangerous pollutant. I see no point in wearing a mask because of that and did not bother during the worst of smoke pollution. It was better not to go out.

Filters and purifiers used with adequate air conditioning may be helpful but they must be properly maintained and the filters cleaned and changed regularly. Also air purifiers were sold out early in the bushfire emergency and were not available to people who needed them. Costs of running and maintaining these devices are high.

Improving the health of the everyone, but especially the elderly, by making it possible to improve air quality in their homes would save the public purse in the long run. Of course it would also improve the quality of life for older people.

State public health services should be able to develop plans for assisting those in need during episodes of high pollution and very hot weather and must fund local government to put in place necessary local measures such as transport to libraries and other safe places.

There is also a need for services for the homeless during episodes of high pollution and very hot weathe. These must also be properly funded..

We must address climate change in order to minimise future heat waves and bushfires. Standards for construction projects must be tightened.

New vehicle standards are needed with petrol and diesel vehicles being replaced with electric vehicles. On a recent visit to London I noticed the high number of electric powered commercial vehicles encouraged by London's policy of reducing costs for businesses with such vehicles.

Transport for London was also updating the bus fleet to minimise pollution. This needs to happen in NSW.