

**Submission
No 25**

**INQUIRY INTO PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT
OPERATIONS AMENDMENT (CLEAN AIR) BILL 2021**

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I want to make a submission about the NSW Clean Air Bill. I am very concerned that there is no safe level of exposure to air pollution and I feel we lack the basic protections in NSW to protect our citizens.

I worked previously in rehabilitation and later in an educational disability unit. I have watched the struggle of young people with asthma trying to cope. I know that 'bad air days' made their health so much worse. Sometimes serious asthma attacks resulted in permanent brain damage due to a lack of oxygen. The toll serious asthma takes on young people and their families is not something I would wish on anyone.

Over the years I had contact with people with a variety of disabling conditions that were affected badly by high levels of air pollution around Muswellbrook and Singleton in the Upper Hunter. As more mines were opened their difficulties increased and many had to leave the area in order to breathe! Residents in the Upper Hunter have been complaining about the air pollution for years without any improvement being made. This pollution leads to a large number of deaths but the cause of death is always labelled something else so most people don't realise how much the air pollution from coal mining and power production contributes to deaths from heart attacks, cancers, asthma etc.

I was speaking to a very fit, sporting young man from Aberdeen (in the Upper Hunter) recently and I asked him what he thought about the air quality locally. He told me that day to day he didn't notice how bad it was but when he left the area he felt that his breathing improved and that he felt less 'blocked up'. So, no one is immune from the effects of air pollution.

It greatly concerns me that new coal mines are allowed to open, and existing ones are allowed to extend their activities in areas already coping with terribly high levels of air pollution.

It seems to me that the EPA is ineffective because whatever activity the Department of Planning approves it has to license the pollution caused by the activity. There needs to be a proper separation of EPA and Planning and the EPA needs to have real teeth to implement a program to control and reduce particle pollution from coal mines and to limit extensions or new mines where air quality standards are already exceeded.

Extensions are just allowed willy, nilly currently. The once beautiful village of Bulga, now 'eaten' by a huge coal mine that gradually consumed the town, extension by extension, is a perfect example of this. There needs to be a 20km buffer zone between communities and open cut mines and real penalties for inadequate pollution control practices. Polluters should pay fees as penalties for polluting and they must be high enough to actually be a penalty. Currently this is not happening with coal mines or coal fired power stations.

I live near 2 coal fired power stations – Eraring and Vales Point- and have seen the dirty smear of nitrous oxide in the air around the power stations and seen the toxic coal ash blow off the coal ash dumps in dry weather to affect nearby suburbs. But there is other pollution, such as sulphur dioxide and mercury, that I cannot see that is harming us and is not properly monitored or regulated. Other countries regulate their coal fired power stations far better than we do here. I feel that we are treated very poorly and our health is not protected. Why can't we have that same level of protection? The standards in Australia are so poor yet Vales Point power station is allowed to double that pollution. How many deaths is this causing? Our standards are an absolute joke.

I would like to see a plan for coal fired power stations to be required to achieve BACT emission levels urgently.

Our fuel standards are also very poor – the lowest rank out of 35 OECD countries. Diesel vehicles are more toxic than petrol cars yet we are importing more and more of them. Federal Government tax arrangements seem to actively encourage it!

We are now the destination for dirty cars that can't be sold overseas. We need to introduce fuel standards in line with European standards for cars, trucks and rail transport. We also need to quickly move to electric transport. This will be much cleaner, eliminate a lot of air pollution and

reduce health problems and health costs substantially. Introducing Low Emissions Zones in busy, city areas would be helpful.

I would like to see bans on sales and installations of wood heaters in residential areas or where the nearest home is less than 100m away. Existing wood heaters should be removed when the house is sold or where neighbours are suffering health impacts from the smoke. I know people who suffer from health effects from neighbouring wood smoke but have little recourse currently. Funds should be available to Councils to assist people to remove heaters by offering funds to help the removal or to pay for insulation or air conditioning.

I would like to see sensible action to give more protections to citizens. The NSW government should adopt the Clean Air Action Plan in order to have some improvements in the largest sources of air pollution.

There should be proper monitoring, assessment and reporting of air pollution around coal fired power stations and areas with coal mining, particularly the Hunter Valley and Lake Macquarie. The NSW government should develop targets for reduction in air pollution to best practice levels achieved in other countries and give polluters a timeframe to comply- as happens in other countries. Targets and timeframes should be reported to the public regularly.

The NSW government should periodically revise and strengthen the ambient air quality standards in line with epidemiological data and the best health advice. This should be done regularly every 5-7 years.

Yours sincerely,

Kim Grierson