

Submission
No 27

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

Organisation: Community Environment Network (Central Coast)

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Submission on the Protection of the Environment Operations Amendment (Clean Air) Bill
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From Community Environment Network (Central Coast)

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The Community Environment Network is the peak community environment body on the Central Coast established over 20 years ago representing a large membership and many affiliated groups.

The population of the Central Coast are largely exposed to much of the pollution of power station fallout and documentation around problems of health and exposure have notified State Government bodies as far back as the 1980's.

CEN refers here to the work of Environmental Justice Australia in their submission for "the People's Clean Air Action Plan for NSW". EJA have been working with CEN for the last 5 years bringing to notice the need for tighter regulations around air pollution by interviewing and advising both EPA NSW, local and State Members of Parliament and health agencies.

EJA's Clean Air Action Plan identifies the largest sources of controllable air pollution and the actions that the NSW Government must take to reduce it to best practice control standards. We urge the NSW Government to adopt the Plan and the actions it lists throughout. The submitted 29 page document is comprehensively referencing 125 documents and studies both from Australia and overseas.

THE POWER INDUSTRY AND PUBLIC HEALTH

On the Coast we have no public access to known public hospital admissions for Upper Respiratory Tract Infections (URTI) for either children or overall age groups. For instance there is a perfect opportunity for the Strategy to map the likely results of power station fallout by publishing material from, local hospitals (Wyang and Gosford) likely to be higher, compared with, say, Belmont Hospital as a general reference point for least exposure to fallout from power generation. Seasonal influence via graphs would expose danger periods such as winter times and temperature inversion which normally exacerbate URTI reactions in the population.

These steps would inform the public, health bodies, and Government itself to monitor impacts.

The new air quality monitor only recently installed by the Government at Lake Macquarie has already issued "alerts" for exceedences of PM 10 pollution on 5 occasions within about 6 weeks. Here is an indication of what presents a problem for residents in the region.

The National Pollution Inventory (NPI) maps the outputs of industry for the Australian Government. The huge tonnages of SO₂, NO_x and heavy metals recorded by local power stations to the NPI should indicate the impact upon health from that continuous exposure. The NSW Government needs to become serious about integrating NPI figures and extrapolating the likely influences on URTI admissions on local populations here on the Central Coast and in the Hunter. The integration of all the data available to the NPI, EPA NSW, the Environment Ministerial office and the Health Ministerial office should be public accessible. By not informing the State's health professional bodies and those suffering URTI issues is surely a dereliction of duty, and a serious one at that.

The Draft Strategy falls short in considering the vast pollution outputs of the power station industry as well as coal extraction pollution. By playing down these major influences the credibility of the NSW Government is put in doubt. The overwhelming data and input from studies as outlined in the EJA material will not go away but will continue to be refined and distributed to wider populations as each year goes on.

CEN, having worked with EJA during those last 5 years, has to agree that reforms have not progressed as they should. Our constituency, we know, is suffering from pollution overload and it is incumbent upon our own NSW Government, through its agencies, to plan to address the correlation between pollution and public health, and to make those regular statistics publicly available so that change will occur with public knowledge and input.

Doctors for the Environment organisation have widely published, as you would be aware, statistics relating to the number of deaths and serious health impacts that the burning of coal, has upon populations of the Hunter, Central Coast and Sydney. These figures are alarming in the least and need to be fleshed out in the public space. EPA NSW and the Department of Health should open up formal public debate on these claims to help inform the wider populace. These claims should not just be dismissed by Government bodies in one line statements in the media.

The current application by Vales Point Power Station for a further 5 year extension of its Exemption Licence beyond standard pollution limits should be rejected outright by EPA NSW. No NSW power station has world standard technology to contain pollutants. To allow Vales Point to continue to exceed even current NSW limits would be a slap in the face to constituents of the Central Coast. The exemption licence to pollute above the already high value for acceptable NO_x emissions in NSW should not be renewed.

TRANSPORT INDUSTRY

Renewables, in all aspects of either power generation or in vehicle transport, have made great advance in the last 10 years. Hybrid vehicles continue to play a role towards fully electric transport and have been embraced by the domestic population without major problems.

Public transport itself needs to expand and whilst the NSW Government has achieved advances in upgrading our rail network, once again embraced by the constituents of NSW, more is required to expand the bus networks throughout the state. Private operators often find it hard to deliver these services economically. State Government should look at greater incentives for private bus operators to expand services and to have those operators transition their fleet to

either electric or hydrogen (which is emerging as a new and exciting resource) to enable greater economic use of public transport. This would be a genuine “win-win” for reducing road use and reducing pollution in a big way.

Fully electric private and public transport is beginning to impact upon the national fleet where we see, for instance, NRMA have advanced their own recharging station network. The NSW Government needs to ramp up this recharging system particularly in the Sydney metropolitan region, in Newcastle, Wollongong, and in larger regional rural centres. By advancing this system ahead of larger uptake of electric vehicles it will give greater incentive for people to choose to purchase this new age technology.

In both power generation and vehicle fleet moving forward to transition to new technologies, it is important to remember that new jobs quickly emerge in retrofitting as has been the case with installation of solar systems throughout NSW.

BATTERIES

Whilst domestic battery/solar systems are currently expensive for the average household prices will continue to fall. Technicians talk of the idea of community based batteries to gather solar generation. These batteries have been trialled overseas which see groups of households invest in a larger common roadside serviceable battery jointly owned and serviced by these households. This clearly spreads the economic outlay and servicing and reduces the dependence on poles and wires, seen by most people, as truly old infrastructure.

Natural disasters now impact upon communities more often and greater effort has to be given, at greater expense to the public purse, to repair public infrastructure effectively.

By people investing in independent battery systems the State Government is less likely to be called upon to spend large amounts for repair after a disaster.

CEN recommends the following:

- A. That reforms as outlined by Environment Justice Australia in their submission be enacted.
- B. Implement integration of local hospital URTI admissions as outlined above and make these publicly available on an annual basis
- C. Integrate National NPI figures into pollution data for NSW and make comprehensive data publicly accessible
- D. Bring claims by Doctors for the Environment forward for public debate
- E. Terminate the pollution Exemption Licence for the Vales Point Power Station currently before EPA NSW.
- F. Invest in vehicle electric charging stations throughout NSW and move the Government fleet to electric power.
- G. Apply greater incentives to public bus operators throughout NSW and have them transition to new technologies to power their fleet.

CEN would welcome the opportunity to speak to this submission.

Yours faithfully

Michael Campbell OAM on behalf of the Community Environment Network