

Islington Village Community Group

history diversity community

P.O. Box 132, Islington 2296

Friday 8 March 2013

Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs,
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir / Madam,

Submission to the Senate Committee Inquiry into the Impacts of Air Quality on Health

Thank you for the opportunity to submit to this important inquiry.

The Islington Village Community Group (**IVCG**) was established to involve and inform the local village community in and on local issues, and on matters of Local, State and Federal government as they impact or affect their community. The IVCG is a not for profit organisation focussed on involvement for local community members with fun initiatives and the sharing of information.

The stated objects of the organisation are:

- to provide support for groups of Islington Village community members to undertake projects that benefit the general Islington community, and
- to represent the interests of Islington Village community members in matters IVCG deems affect the Islington community, and
- to carry out any ancillary activities that assist the organisation to pursue the above objects.

Sadly, major matters outside our control impact our daily lives that often necessitate our group to make representation at all levels of government to protect the quality of life enjoyed in such a vibrant inner city community like Islington and the surrounding neighbourhoods of Tighes Hill, Maryville and Wickham.

The export of coal and the impacts that this activity is having on our daily lives is one such matter and one that IVCG would like to put before the Senate Inquiry into Air Quality on Health.

We urge the committee to consider conducting a hearing in the Hunter region. As the major exporting port of coal in Australia this issue is of intense community concern and debate in both the Upper and Lower Hunter region. Our community group, along with many others, has the desire to actively participate in the Senate Inquiry process and would welcome the opportunity to be able to communicate these concerns directly with the Inquiry members.

Yours faithfully,

Terry McCauley

Coordinator
Islington Village Community Group

Check us out at either our website:

<http://islingtonvillage.wordpress.com/>

or on facebook:

<http://www.facebook.com/IslingtonVillage>

(1) Planning processes

The NSW State government has before it a proposal for the construction of a new coal loader on Kooragang Island, referred to as T4. The initial proposal was for a coal loader with a capacity of 120Mtpa which but this was recently downgraded with the proposal now being considered in stages.

The proponent has prepared an environmental impact assessment on this reduced capacity but the cumulative effects of the total project should be assessed by government now, not in stages. The total size of the project will have detrimental health effects on the community, especially in relation to particulates emitted into the surrounding air, that will not only impact the community adjacent to the rail corridor and coal loader facilities but also the wider community given the recent evidence of dust found in communities up to 40 kilometres further afield.

If the project is assessed in stages and not as a total, as the proponent proposes, the IVCG argues that it will fail to adequately assess the full health and social costs and benefits.

(2) Heath effects

Recent studies and data collection results of particulate matter collected in the Upper and Lower Hunter by State government agencies and private sources has confirmed the alarming presence of particulate matter in the air at disturbing levels. Despite the lack of specific detail, some of this particulate matter will no doubt be the direct result of coal mining and coal power station activities.

We appreciate that particulate matter is generated from coal transportation, coal fired power stations, mining, wood or vegetation combustion, industry and motor vehicles. However, with the available science on the size and composition of particles that can influence damage to human health then the results are concerning. Particulate matter may be coarse, fine or ultrafine (PM₁₀, PM_{2.5}, PM₁) and it is known that the particulate sizes can aggravate chronic respiratory and cardiac disease, damage the lungs and increase the risk of premature death.

Fine particles are able to penetrate further into the lungs and also enter the bloodstream via the lungs and cause disease in other parts of the body. There is much scientific evidence that links ambient exposure to particulates and health effects, particularly in relation to fine particles, which are strongly associated with mortality and hospitalisation due to cardio-pulmonary disease. No level of particulate matter is safe, but the effects are related to the level of pollution.

In the Hunter region there are reported increases in hospitalisation for disease and conditions known to be associated with increased particulate matter in the air we breathe. The NSW Health Department has made a submission to the proposed T4 development. That report urges the Planning Department to reject the proposal for sound health reasons. The Senate Inquiry should support this position as any increase in health costs and budgets far outweigh the economic rationale and income derived from the development. The effects of the development will continue to be felt on health budgets at State and Federal level long after the coal loader has closed.

At no stage has the Newcastle community been informed of the health effects that will occur if the proposed T4 coal loader facility is constructed. Indeed, previous coal loader expansions proponents have never informed communities of the possible detrimental health effects of those proposals either.

(3) Air monitoring

New proposals like T4 should not be approved, given the general view of medical experts, including Doctors for the Environment Australia, that current monitoring and reporting practices for air quality (particulates and gases) are inadequate to fully protect public health.

The Hunter region is fortunate to have a series of air monitoring stations installed in the upper and lower parts of the valley but the data is collected is from along rail corridors and is relatively young and raw. The number of stations should be increased and spread further afield in the community to capture particulate data from a wider spread and importantly the stations should also be enhanced with the latest technology to provide the best possible dataset for analysis. The data would then need to be critically analysed and the results announced before any decision is made.

Having stated this, I would like to report that many residents have experienced difficulty on a regular basis in accessing the data results from the NSW Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) website. Some residents have even reported an uncooperative attitude and response from EPA Officers when the department has been contacted over their inability to access data results. Notably, also the EPA site does not report any data captured and reported by industry from any location, like the Newcastle Orica site.

Therefore, one key recommendation from the Senate Inquiry should be the establishment of one central website for the reporting of air quality monitoring data from all sources, government and industry.

A second key recommendation should be the implementation of more rigorous licencing reviews toward the measurement of very fine coal particles.

The presence of 30 metre high coal piles without cover or adequate technology to manage the coal particles flowing across Newcastle is not industry performing its duty of care to people's health. Inadequate technology and strategies are being applied by industry to minimise and protect the Newcastle community's health from the effects of coal', as it should under Work Health & Safety legislation.

IVCG would also like to urge the Senate Inquiry to review and consider the standards set for air quality. Many Doctors and Scientists believe that the current standards and National benchmarks for air quality monitoring in Australia are inadequate, as defined by the Australian Ambient Air Quality National Environment Protection Measure (AAQ NEPM). In 1998, the NEPM set Standards for six criteria air pollutants including PM₁₀, and gases, and in 2003 it added PM_{2.5}.

A review of the NEPM commenced in 2005 but IVCG believe that this hasn't yet been completed. This is unbelievable given the importance to human health of a basic, like air quality. The review must be escalated and the Measures be amended to make Australian standards at or better than world standards. Everyday discussion is now about PM_{1.0} or even smaller.

New guidelines need to be put in operation especially given some Australian standards are less stringent than those recommended by the World Health Organisation.

IVCG is fortunate to have a member who actively participates as a community representative on the Newcastle Community Consultative Committee for the Environment. IVCG receives regular reports on activities and outcomes from that committee.

(4) Other matters

(4.1) Personal and community anxieties

The Islington community is situated directly next to a major rail corridor that services the Port Waratah Coal Services (**PWCS**) coal loader facility at Carrington. The corridor runs through the north portion of the suburb. The local primary school is also within half a kilometre of the tracks.

Islington being situated close to the Hunter River and coast line is fortunate to receive regular sea breezes but this also helps disperse particular matter throughout the whole community.

However, many residents report a large increase in dust settling on the outside and inside of their homes over the past ten (10) years, particularly the past five (5) years. This coincides with massive increases in coal exports from the Port of Newcastle.

Dust from coal stock piles is “dusting the suburbs” of Tighes Hill, Maryville, Islington, Wickham, Carrington and the Central Business District of Newcastle

IVCG is not satisfied that with air quality monitoring and reporting. It is only the past 12 or so months that has seen the EPA actively engaged, on a regular basis, with the community on this matter.

(4.2) Dust

Dust has increased at alarming rates over the past decade. IVCG assesses that this has been caused and is attributed to the increase in traffic, rail and road, to the Port of Newcastle. This relates no doubt to the increase in road traffic delivering and removing products from the Port and also the number of coal trains delivering coal to the various coal loaders.

IVCG recognises that coal particulates are not regarded as dust for these purposes but the movement of large long trains, comprising heavy coal wagons (84T coal loads) and heavy locomotives (approx. 130T each) is generating the disbursement of dust from the ground into the air and this dust is being blown into the Islington and surrounding communities by the prevailing winds.

This is alarming to local residents due to the:

- Increased dust in and on their properties and cars creating anxiety about cleanliness of their major assets;
- Increased dust generating new unforeseen and uncontrollable health concerns;
- Increased dust in the air we are forced to breathe; and
- The increase in asthma and other respiratory conditions in the Islington and wider Newcastle community, as reported recently by Hunter New England Area Health Service in the Newcastle Herald newspaper.

Therefore, IVCG asks that the Senate Inquiry recommends more stringent standards be adopted in relation to visible dust (TSP).