

Community Submission: Inquiry into health of air quality in Australia

Chris Brown

To The Senate Community Affairs Committee,

I am writing to you to in response to your investigation into the impacts of air quality in Australia.

Firstly, I applaud your inquiry in investigate air quality in Australia, it is very well overdue.

I live in Newcastle NSW, the home to one of the largest coal ports in the world. Throughout many many suburbs surrounding Kooragang island, and coal transport corridors, the negative impacts of coal and gas extraction are clear. Absolutely every surface is constantly coated in a layer of coal dust, and it takes next to no time to accumulate after cleaning, indicating the concentrations of particulates in the air.

The impacts of air quality on public health, are clearly not understood, which brings me to a conversation I had with a middle-aged woman who had recently moved from the blue mountains to Carrington – a suburb directly next to the coal loaders. She told me that within weeks of moving from the clean country air, she noticed she was becoming sick, and developed respiratory problems, such as asthma. Her health has continued to decline, and has recently been diagnosed with cancer. For her whole life she has been well, and within a handful of years of moving close to the coal loaders and coal transport corridor, her health has deteriorated severely.

The coal piles, and train carriages are uncovered and seasonal westerly winds carry particulates in the air to surrounding suburbs, for most of the year. These particulates are poorly managed and are a great risk to the whole Newcastle community.

The communities which are the most at risk are those which are closely located to transport corridors and coal piles, such as; Carrington, mayfield, Stockton, Fullerton Cove, Tighes Hill, Wickham, Maryville, Cooks hill and the Newcastle CBD. All of these suburbs are densely populated and all of them have schools with thousands of students. The next generation at ages as young as 4, are placed directly next to the source of toxic pollutants.

The current standards, data collection methods, monitoring and regulation throughout all levels of government is critically insufficient. Independent testing of air quality by local residents through the use of community grant money has indicated air quality as exceeding national air quality standards on many many occasions.

The total extent and prevalence of dangerous levels of contaminants in our air is not known, and should be investigated to identify areas at the greatest risk, and to implement change to reduce those risks. I am sure that the air quality will be found to be extremely poor in the suburbs surrounding coal mines, coal stacks, and transport corridors, and understanding it's impacts on health is essential to minimising human impacts and reducing illness

Thank you for taking the time to consider my concerns.

Regards

Chris Brown