

27th February 2013

The Standing Committee on
Community Affairs
Re impacts of Air Quality on Health



Dear Standing Committee,

Until just over a year ago we lived in the Upper Hunter Valley. We did so for the bulk of the years 1993 to 2012. Over the years, as we came from further west for stopping forays into Muswellbrook, the orange-brown fog that stretched out over the valley intensified in colour and size as mining activities in the area also intensified. Being concerned about what might be in that air we had a hair analysis done in 2009. We were alarmed when the result came back high in a number of toxic elements. On consultation with the National Pollution Inventory we found that those elements we'd been told were high in our systems were also those released by mining and power station activities. Correspondence was entered into with state and federal members. The upshot basically was a discrediting of the veracity of hair analysis laboratories, but no reassurances that the air we were breathing, and the food and the water we were consuming, were not compromised.

We were concerned enough by the encroachment of further mining in our area, and its health, social and environmental implications, to move out of the Upper Hunter in 2012.

People need to be confident that the air they breathe, as well as the water and produce they consume, is not risking their health. The establishing of air quality monitors would be an assurance. This being only, of course, if the monitors were not operated by vested interests, and were regularly streaming easily accessed

results and that they were set to register particulates of 2.5 microns or less. It is particulates of these sizes that represent a genuine concern for health.

I believe that the Standing Committee should take seriously the negative health implications of poor air quality and recommend independent air monitoring to be a matter of course in mining localities and their environs. The elements are not static and wind and rain can transport potentially dangerous by-products of industry further afield.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity of presenting my experiences.

Yours faithfully,
Alyson Shepherd