

4th of March 2020

Submission by Samantha Judge

My family's story of our time living in Barwon Heads

My name is Samantha Judge (Wigmore) and my family and I moved to [REDACTED] in Barwon Heads in 1996 for a healthy coastal and rural lifestyle. We regularly used the council access tracks through the 54 acre park land, the muddies and basin to go to town or take the children to school. We also regularly took the kids to Pirate Park to play. I do remember smelling strange odours when walking through the park on numerous occasions when I was pregnant with my daughter. We were aware of the mosquito spraying around town although the council didn't inform us when and where it was taking place. We didn't realise the severe health impacts of the Geelong Council's mosquito spray program and our subsequent loss of our baby daughter to a rare cancer.

In 1999 I was pregnant with my daughter however there were complications with my pregnancy. At 26 weeks I went into early labour, I was rushed to hospital and after some investigations it was determined that my placenta had torn. Following treatment I was sent home to get some rest and look after myself to nurture my unborn baby girl. On Anzac Day in 1999 my daughter Stevie was born 6 weeks prematurely. After returning home from hospital I felt something wasn't right about her health and contacted the doctor on numerous occasions to voice my concerns. The doctor maintained that because Stevie was born prematurely the concerns I had for her and what I was observing was normal.

I still felt something wasn't right so I took her to a different doctor and he examined her and told me to return home immediately and wait for an ambulance - he suspected that Stevie had leukaemia. Stevie and I were rushed to hospital and we were admitted to the intensive care unit where a series of tests were performed on Stevie to determine her illness. Stevie was then diagnosed with Infantile Acute Lymphocytic Leukemia – a very rare cancer in young babies. We were then transferred to the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne for treatment. The doctors at the RCH informed me that Stevie had a 25% chance of survival. I stayed at Ronald McDonald house for 4 weeks during Stevie's treatment so I could be close to her and continue breast feeding.

On the 14th of October 1999 Stevie passed away in the intensive care unit at the Royal Children's Hospital, she was 5 months old.

In 2008, when my youngest son started attending Barwon Heads kindergarten, I started work at the Barwon Heads Caravan Park. We were unaware that both the kindergarten and primary school were also being sprayed by the Geelong Council and there was no information on when these treatments were taking place. In 2009 I suffered a prolapsed disk and I was in constant pain. I attended the doctors and hospital on numerous occasions and an MRI in Melbourne found my disk to be repairing itself. In 2014 my health deteriorated and the constant pain forced me to quit my work at the Barwon Heads Caravan Park. In 2018 I finally found a doctor who performed further investigations into my neck pain and I was finally diagnosed with a Cervical Dystonia – a rare neurological disease. I was also unaware that the Geelong Council were regularly spraying the Barwon Heads Caravan Park with neurotoxic insecticides during my time working there.

I firmly believe that the City of Greater Geelong's mosquito spraying has affected my health and caused my daughter's death. My youngest son is also suffering undiagnosed gastrointestinal issues and I have since learned that gut health issues are unusually common in the children who live in Barwon Heads.

I hope that the Senate Inquiry will confirm the fact that a chemical exposure in Barwon Heads has occurred and recognition of the detrimental impacts on my family's health as a consequence. Recognition that this has occurred will allow us to prevent it happening again in the future.

Thank you for taking the time to read my submission.

Sam Judge