

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

I would like to preface this submission with a request that the Senate Committee Inquiry be held somewhere in the Hunter valley. There are well documented cases of areas in the coalfields of the Hunter where the incidence of illnesses in towns and villages is much higher than in other places. The testimony of those most affected by the adverse effects of air pollution and the health professionals who treat them would, I am sure, be greatly facilitated by holding the enquiry in close proximity to the cause of the problem.

My reasons for writing this submission are:

1) I live in the town of Maitland which has only one relatively small coal mine in close proximity to the town but the rail line bisects the town and thus residents who live close to the railway have to endure the noise and emissions from numerous coal trains each day. By numerous I mean a coal train of about 100 wagons either empty or full and UNCOVERED every 13 minutes. If the NSW government allows a new coal terminal to be built at the Port of Newcastle the frequency of these trains will increase to one every six minutes. There are at least 6 schools within 300 metres of the rail line which are also being impacted on by the emissions which include P2.5s, p10s, sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxide to mention only a few. Health effects from the above include respiratory and cardio pulmonary problems and, when diesel emissions from the engines are added to the mix, cancer causing agents are also being released.

2) I have written many submissions arguing that there should be a moratorium on new approvals for coal mines until full and comprehensive health studies are carried out on coal emissions and the effects on communities surrounded by coal mines. I feel there has been no attention given to the cumulative effects of mining on health and individual Environmental Impact Statements in many cases offer a totally inadequate assessment of health problems and the cost to the community of these problems.

In all the public hearings at which I have been present residents who live in close proximity to existing mines which are seeking extensions, complain of adverse effects from noise, dust and blasting yet the mines are invariably given the green light. Conditions that are imposed are rendered meaningless as there few or no compliance mechanisms a situation which leaves the residents the choice of having to suffer or sell out mostly at a loss.

Wendy White

