

7 March 2013

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
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Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

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Dear Sir / Madam,

There are multiple impacts on human health as a result of coal mining and diesel fume exposures. Both are matters that the commission should attend to as a matter of urgency. Many communities with higher particulate exposure are in disadvantaged areas and as a result are less able to respond to the health threats presented by industry emissions.

It is my view that all mining and transport projects, in addition to stringent environmental impact assessments, should have to undertake health impact assessments. These health related assessments must take into account the cumulative impact of increased particulate exposure from all sources; transport, dust and related particulates. In addition, concerned residents should be able to request a health impact assessment at fair intervals throughout the life of industry operations rather than just at the beginning to ensure accountability and compliance.

Coal mining communities have been shown to have significantly higher rates of diseases (including cancers and cardiopulmonary disease) than the broader population. It is for this reason I support the Shut the Gate Alliances position which asks the committee to consider recommending baseline air quality monitoring, improving standards in the National Environment Protection Measures (NEPM) - (consistent with World Health Organisation) and the enforcement of compliance with NEPM, possibly through their inclusion in the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.

In addition, the commonwealth must NOT devolve environmental planning and approvals to the states. This would be disastrous for health and for the environment.

In addition to the unchecked threat presented by coal mining, I am also concerned about residential exposure to diesel fumes along truck routes.

The communities of Yarraville and Footscray in inner-western Melbourne have long lobbied for the ever increasing heavy vehicle traffic to be bypassed out of residential areas. The concerns of this community have been heightened by the World Health Organisation's acknowledgement that diesel fume particulates are carcinogenic to humans. Francis Street, Yarraville is a residential street lined with houses and is also has the highest levels of diesel pollution recorded in any residential street in this country. Successive state governments have failed to address this issue while the Port of Melbourne Authority continues to expand its operations and subsequently the truck traffic.

This creeping increase in vehicle traffic goes largely unchecked. Residents should have the right to access a review of the health impacts of ongoing industrial operations. These health impacts should then inform restorative investment priority setting.

I thank the committee for your work and trust that you will recognise that the Australian population deserves a better deal. Health threats from pollutants are largely the result of industry which is seldom held accountable for the associated health costs of their operations.

Yours sincerely

Jennifer Thompson