

Senate Inquiry Impacts of Air Quality on Health

Mackay region on Queensland's Central Coast is already a major coal port. Hay Point/Dalrymple Bay is an established coal terminal and massive expansions are mooted for the adjacent Dudgeon Point. The site is 14kms upwind from Mackay and in an area of ongoing urbanisation. The waters are within the Great Barrier Reef Lagoon.

(a) particulate matter, its sources and effects;

Coal dust from rail transportation and portside handling from mine to ship is a major source of airborne particulate matter in the natural environment and amongst human habitation. Coal trains are not covered and can lose 5% of their load in a transit of 300km leaving a dust plume across the landscape. This is often through dairy farms, cropping land, livestock paddocks, hobby farms, creeks, dams, rivers, small towns and cities. Coal stock piles are not covered and coal dust has been detected 15 kms downwind in towns, estuaries and the sea including the Great Barrier Reef lagoon. Farmers are concerned at the consequences of stock ingesting fodder and drinking water laden with coal dust. Fishers are similarly concerned for the contamination of marine life and urban dwellers have reported coal sludge in rain water tanks and vacuum cleaners choked with coal dust. Effects on health are difficult to assess given the few long range studies and benchmarking. The negative mental health effects of living with constant black dust in clothing, on floors and on roofs are widespread. Falling real estate values leave owners with few options and adds to the anguish and community dislocation.

(b) those populations most at risk and the causes that put those populations at risk;

Local populations in the immediate vicinity of the existing terminal are directly exposed to airborne coal dust. Exposure varies depending on the wind direction but all are exposed. Mackay residents 14 to 20kms away commonly and consistently find coal dust on roofs and cars and in household vacuum cleaners. This is an established and rapidly expanding urban precinct with a broad demographic including young kids and the elderly all breathing readily discernable coal dust pollution.

(c) the standards, monitoring and regulation of air quality at all levels of government.

Monitoring stations are located in the vicinity of the coal port. These are generic air borne particle monitors and relative abundance of the comparative particle sizes is not analysed or publicly available. There is no monitoring of particles <10 microns and no legal requirement to do so even though these are arguably the most insidious health risk, collecting in the deeper recesses of the lungs and even entering the bloodstream.

(c) any other related matters.

The existing coal port and rail lines in Hay Point/Dalrymple bay, polluting as they are, pale into insignificance compared to the coal infrastructure extension proposed at Dudgeon Point immediately north of and abutting them. This facility will have 400Ha uncovered coal stock pile 20m high. Up to 8 rail lines are proposed. The implications for the rapidly expanding and encroaching city of Mackay are alarming and must be addressed by this inquiry.

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