
UPPER HUNTER AIR QUALITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE (UHAQAC)

MEETING MINUTES – Meeting 26

Date: 26 October 2017

Time: 10:00am – 11:40 am

File: EF13/5718, DOC17/564416-02

Meeting Location: Singleton Civic Centre Auditorium, Foyer Meeting Space, 8-10 Queen St, Singleton, NSW 2330

In attendance: John Tate (Chair), Mayor Wayne Bedggood, Dr Craig Dalton, Ben Harrison, Lyn MacBain, Geoffrey Sharrock, John Watson, Sarah Lukeman, David Williams

Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH): Scott Thompson

Environment Protection Authority (EPA): Mitchell Bennett, Holly Love, Michael Howat.

Apologies: Mark Scandrett, Dr Catherine Chicken, Andrew Speechly, John Krey, Lindy Hyam, Morgana Gidley-Baird, Matthew Parkinson, Matt Riley, Cr Danny Thompson

Acknowledgement of Country

Agenda Item:

1. Welcome and Introductions

Mr Tate welcomed and introduced attendees.

2. Apologies

See above. Mr Tate also acknowledged Leanne Graham who has left the EPA. Mr Tate noted her excellent work and read a statement from Leanne complimenting the work of the committee. Mr Tate proposed the committee send a letter to Leanne thanking her for her contribution and work. Agreed by group.

Action item 1. Committee to send letter to Leanne Graham thanking her for her support and contribution to the committee.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting, No. 25 of 27 July and Actions Arising

The Committee agreed to adopt previous meeting minutes as a true and accurate record.

The EPA provided the following advice on actions from the previous meeting.

- Ms Love explained the EPA Stakeholder Survey 2016-17 has been published, and can be found at <http://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/about-us/publications-and-reports/epa-stakeholder-survey>
- The EPA updated the Committee on agencies' actions to protect the community from the smoke impacts of hazard reduction burning. Ms Love advised that the inter-agency protocols for communicating information about hazard reduction burns had been finalised. Already these protocols have been used to communicate about burns in the Sydney region.

-
- Ms Love discussed the EPA's communication strategy. Following the departure of Leanne Graham from the EPA, this element of work has not been completed. It still remains a priority for the EPA and will be undertaken with the new Committee in early 2018. It was also noted by Ms Love that, since the last meeting, some great work was done utilising the Broke Village Fair to talk with the community and Ms Love thanked those on the Committee that had been involved in this work.
 - Mr Bennett addressed Committee on the national air quality standards for sulfur dioxide (SO₂) compared to World Health Organisation (WHO) 24-hour standards. The NSW Government is currently involved in national review, which includes SO₂ and consideration of WHO guidelines. A draft report is due for public consultation in 2018.
 - Mr Bennett advised that he would give a presentation later in meeting regarding the action item on regulation of vegetation burning.

4. Community Feedback

Mr Tate invited committee members to provide feedback from their contact networks.

Mr Sharrock noted the EPA's display at the Broke Village Fair. The EPA met with generally positive feedback and engagement from the community. Mr Bennett noted the large number of community members that attended the fair and the number of people from outside the local region.

Ms MacBain asked the following:

- Does the EPA's dust control program for coal mines apply at night as well?

Mr Bennett explained the mines are required to minimise dust at all times including nights. He also noted that wind speed drops at night and this can often lead to dust staying suspended and increasing particle readings around coal mines.

- With a hot and dry Summer predicted – how much water can the coal mines realistically apply during this period?

Mr Bennett noted that he will address dust matters in his presentation.

EPA printed and provided copies of several media articles relating to Upper Hunter air quality to the Committee. Mr Bennett confirmed that the EPA intends to issue a media release following each meeting.

Action item 2. EPA to issue media release following meeting.

5. Update on Five Year Review of Upper Hunter Air Quality Monitoring Network

Mr Thompson updated the Committee on the five year review. OEHL is currently collating comments and intends to complete the review prior to the next Committee meeting.

6. Air Quality Report Seasonal Analysis Winter 2017

Mr Thompson presented the Upper Hunter Air Quality Monitoring Network Winter 2017 seasonal analysis. Key points included:

- The Upper Hunter received much lower rainfall during Winter 2017 than the long term average. Total rainfall for July and August was very much below average, with average rainfall for June. Total rainfall was 100 – 200 mm less than in Winter 2016.
- Temperature ranges (both maximum and minimum values) were above average.
- Levels of PM₁₀ were above the national benchmark for ten days (7, 26 and 28-31 July, and 7, 11 and 15-16 August). These occurred at Singleton NW (2 days), Mount Thorley (5 days) and Camberwell (8 days). The total number of days of PM₁₀ over the national benchmark for Winter 2017 (10) is higher than previous highest number of days over national benchmark for winter period of 7 days in 2012.
- Levels of PM_{2.5} were above the national benchmark on one day (27 June) at Muswellbrook. Mr Thompson proposed that cooler weather conditions on that date indicate that the exceedance is likely to have been caused by wood smoke. A single day of PM_{2.5} levels over national benchmark is less than in previous winter periods.
- Levels of SO₂ and NO₂ were below national benchmarks.
- Rolling annual average PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀ graphs show an increase in PM₁₀ at Camberwell monitoring station compared to previous 2 years, but comparable to 2013/14 period. This is consistent with the dry wind and strong predominant NW winds recorded. There were no exceedances in major population centres of Singleton and Muswellbrook.
- Gaps in time series graphs resulted from data logger outages.

7. EPA Update on Upper Hunter Air Quality Management

Mr Bennett reported on:

- The EPA attended the Broke Village Fair on 10 September 2017. There is potential for EPA to attend the Muswellbrook Show in February or March 2018.
- The EPA attended the Mt Arthur Colliery Community Consultative Committee (CCC) and presented on the EPA's Optimisation of Air Quality Monitoring. Attendance at CCC meetings for other coal mines is proposed.
- A Dust Risk Forecasting Trial is currently underway using meteorological forecasts to provide a risk forecast for dust generation. Coal mines will provide activity data to the EPA in January 2018. This additional data will be used to analyse the model predictions and determine factors that may have influenced model predictions and accuracy. The EPA is aiming to have preliminary results to present at the next meeting.
- Mr Watson asked how the EPA would implement the model and how the EPA would contact and notify industry of model predictions. Mr Bennett noted this will be determined in consultation with the industry if the trial proves successful.

- EPA continues unannounced coal mine inspections.
- Ms MacBain reported on a mine blast near Camberwell on 6 October that she had observed. She asked if the EPA had received any community calls about it.

Action item 3: EPA to review its Environment Line for any community or industry calls received in relation to mine blast on 6 October 2017.

- Mr Harrison updated the committee on Department of Planning and Environment (DPE) compliance activities:
 - DPE's compliance office was set up with seven staff, but this has expanded to 23 staff. The office now addresses compliance issues with about 1200 development consents across the state, not just coal mines.
 - Coal mines are still inspected on a risk assessment basis. Community and industry calls are received and activities are inspected as required.
 - The EPA and DPE liaise on inspections and regulatory actions.

8. Financial Reconciliation Report 2016/17 – Upper Hunter Air Quality Monitoring Network

Mr Bennett presented the reconciliation report. Key points included:

- The EPA is implementing new procedures to improve Upper Hunter Air Quality Monitoring Network invoicing.
- Actual expenditure during 2016-17 was close to budget forecasts.
- In response to a question from Ms MacBain, Mr Bennett explained that contractor costs are mainly the monitoring, quality assurance, reporting, repairs and calibration carried out by OEH.

9. Regulation of Vegetation Burning

Mr Bennett presented a summary of the legislation and requirements associated with vegetation burning in the Upper Hunter to address a question from Mr Scandrett at the previous meeting.

- The EPA provides the 'Local Government Air Quality Toolkit' to local councils to assist in the regulation of burning and other issues.
- The air quality impacts of burning are regulated under the Protection of the Environment Operations (Clean Air) Regulation 2010. This Regulation specifies which burning activities require approval.
- Agricultural burning can be carried out in all areas without approval, however clause 6C of the Regulation requires all burning to be done in a manner that prevents or minimises air pollution.

10. General Business

Mr Sharrock asked if local General Practitioners have elected to receive air quality monitoring network alerts. Ms MacBain noted she is aware of three local GP's that do receive network alerts. Mr Bedggood noted Muswellbrook Council would like to update their website to include information about network alerts and what they mean.

Ms MacBain asked how mined areas that have been exposed for several years can be better addressed.

- Mr Bennett explained that the EPA's Dust Stop program had reduced dust generating areas.
- Mr Watson noted that the EPA, DPE and Department of Resources and Geoscience are all involved in mine rehabilitation matters. Various instruments are used to set, monitor and achieve rehabilitation targets, including Mining Operations Plans. Mr Watson also noted that a more consistent approach to rehabilitation is now being taken.

Mr Williams raised the issue of rehabilitation standards at quarries.

- Mr Harrison clarified the planning and consent process for quarries and that the consent authority may be DPE or local council.
- Mr Howat explained that a licence from the EPA is required for quarries producing 30,000 tonnes per annum or more.

Dr Dalton raised concern that the reduction in the National Environment Protection Measure (NEPM) goals by 2025 is not taken into account in the impact assessment process for coal mines.

Ms Lukeman noted that Singleton Council are currently considering a re-zoning proposal in Bridgeman Road, Singleton, which is near the Rix's Creek coal mine.

Mr Tate noted this was the final meeting in the current Committee's tenure. Mr Tate thanked all members and representatives for their contribution and input, and encouraged all members to re-nominate to continue the good work of the Committee.

Meeting closed at 11.40 am.

Next meeting date: Thursday, 22 February 2018.

Minutes for review by: John Tate (Chair)