



UPPER HUNTER AIR QUALITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE (UHAQAC)

MEETING MINUTES – Meeting 19

Date: 25 February 2016

Time: 10:00am – 1:00 pm

File: EF13/5718, DOC16/237938-01

Meeting Location: Singleton Library Meeting Room

In attendance: John Tate (Chairperson), Mayor Wayne Bedggood, Dr Craig Dalton, Morgana Gidley-Baird, Ben Harrison, Lindy Hyam, Cr Hollee Jenkins, Lyn MacBain, John Watson.

Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH): Alan Betts.

Environment Protection Authority (EPA): Mitchell Bennett, Nadia Kanoush, Tom Richards, Aleksandra Young, Leanne Graham.

Apologies: Dr Catherine Chicken, John Krey, Geoffrey Sharrock, Andrew Speechly, Sylvia Bell (EPA) and Adam Gilligan (EPA).

Agenda Item:

Acknowledgement of Country

1. Welcome and Introductions

Mr Tate welcomed attendees to the first meeting of the Committee's new term.

2. Apologies

See above. The EPA advised that Muswellbrook Shire Council planned to nominate a representative in March 2016.

3. Introductory Comments from the Members of the New Committee

Mr Tate welcomed Ms Hyam as the new community representative nominated by the Minister and Mr Harrison representing the Department of Planning, replacing Mr Scott Brooks. New members outlined their experience relevant to the committee. Ms Hyam has experience in environmental management and education and agriculture. Mr Harrison has experience working with Department of Planning in Sydney and Singleton.

Mr Tate explained that meetings proceeded without formal motions. He encouraged members to reach consensus decisions, noting that a vote may be called if consensus could not be reached. Mr Tate welcomed healthy debate and the minuting of dissenting views if members requested.

4. Opening Remarks from EPA

The Committee's Terms of Reference guide the work of the committee to advise the Minister and the EPA on the operation of the air quality monitoring network and the management of regional air quality in Upper Hunter by the EPA and industry. The EPA will guide a review of the Terms of Reference by the Committee at a future meeting.

The EPA encouraged the Committee to communicate feedback to and from the contact networks of the members' interest groups.

The Committee meets four times a year, aligning with the OEH's reporting of seasonal air quality trends and performance. Future meeting dates are 28 April, 28 July and 27 October 2016.

Mr Bennett encouraged new members to ask questions to assist their understanding of the Committee's role. He looked forward to the Committee's continuing success in building good relationships in the Upper Hunter between the community, industry and the associated organisations.

5. Minutes of Previous Meeting, No. 18 of 29 October 2016

The EPA circulated the draft minutes to former members and received one request for minor amendments to clarify details of the site visit to Ravensworth open cut mine. Mr Tate proposed that the Committee accepted the amendments and adopted the minutes.

The Committee adopted the minutes as a true and accurate record.

The EPA confirmed that the Director North sent a letter in November 2015, thanking Mr Kelly at Ravensworth Operations for hosting the Committee on 29 October 2016.

6. Actions Arising from Previous Meetings

The EPA advised there were no outstanding actions from the previous meeting.

Responding to recommendations from previous minutes:

- The publication of the annual and seasonal air quality reports was imminent. An upgrade of OEH's web site to improve readability delayed publication.
- New procedures to improve the speed of providing messages to the community on the seasonal trends the air quality involved:
 1. The EPA would provide the air quality newsletters for the Committee's review on the Monday before the meeting,
 2. The EPA would distribute key messages, agreed to at the meeting, for the Committee to distribute to their community or industry networks after the meeting and for members to report any feedback at the next meeting, and
 3. The OEH would publish the air quality newsletters within the week after the meeting.
- An initiative by the EPA and the EPA to improve the means of explaining air quality to the community involved the production of a short animation on air quality in the upper and lower Hunter. The video would follow the style of the short animation on the EPA web site which explained air pollution in the Sydney basin, covering the key sources of pollution and how geography and weather influenced the concentration and dispersion of air pollution. The animation may be viewed on the EPA website at <http://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/air/>.

Action 1. The EPA to email to committee members the link to the EPA's webpage, to view the short animation that explains air pollution in the Sydney basin.

7. Air Quality in the Upper Hunter: Spring 2015

Mr Betts (OEH) presented the draft seasonal newsletter, reporting on the Upper Hunter Air Quality Monitoring Network results and performance for spring 2015. Key points included:

- Compared with previous spring seasons, levels of PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀ were lower in spring 2015.
- Air quality was generally good in the Upper Hunter from 1 September to 30 November 2015
- Levels of fine particulate matter PM_{2.5} (particles less than or equal to 2.5 microns in diameter), nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and sulfur dioxide (SO₂) were all below benchmark concentrations.
- Larger population centres of Muswellbrook and Singleton recorded one day and two days over the PM₁₀ benchmark, respectively. One of these days at Singleton was only over the benchmark because of an unexplained one hour spike.
- Daily average levels for particulate matter PM₁₀ (less than or equal to 10 microns in diameter) were above the 50 µg/m³ benchmark on ten days during spring 2015, generally related to six events with elevated levels (17/9, 4-7/10, 12/10, 17/10, 20/11 and 25-26/11). Maximum PM₁₀ levels on these days ranged from 53.0 to 79.9 µg/m³.
- Some smaller communities experienced one to five days over the PM₁₀ benchmark: Warkworth (1), Maison Dieu (3) and Camberwell (5).
- Diagnostic sites, closer to the mines, recorded one to six days over the PM₁₀ benchmark: Muswellbrook NW (1), Singleton NW (3) and Mount Thorley (6).
- The background site of Singleton South recorded one day over the PM₁₀ benchmark.
- Air quality was good at Aberdeen, Bulga, Jerrys Plains, Wybong and Merriwa, with all days were below the PM₁₀ benchmark.
- The most widespread PM₁₀ event occurred on 26 November 2015, with eight sites over the benchmark. The maximum 24-hour average PM₁₀ level was 79.9 µg/m³ at the Singleton NW diagnostic site. Elevated levels were associated with predominantly moderate to strong northwest to west winds, with a late evening hourly spike as winds turned southeast. The Merriwa background site recorded a 24-hour average PM₁₀ of 40 µg/m³, indicating particle transport from west of the valley. Other than a fire to the south-east at Stanford Merthyr, a few small fires were reported within the valley on this day.
- The Upper Hunter experienced average rainfall during spring 2015. Maximum temperatures were above average. Minimum temperatures reached the highest on record during the season, with numerous records broken in New South Wales during an early-season heat wave in October.

Mr Betts also reported on 2011-2015 annual average concentrations for PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}:

- PM₁₀ annual average levels were below the criterion at 11 of the 14 air quality monitoring station, with the exception of Camberwell, Maison Dieu and Singleton North West.

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- PM_{2.5} annual average levels were below the criterion at Singleton during the five year period and at Camberwell for four years, with the exception of 2013. Levels at Muswellbrook were above the criterion for five years.

Mr Betts noted that Singleton and Muswellbrook recorded higher PM_{2.5} 1-hour average levels in the cooler months during 2011-2015. Camberwell recorded higher PM_{2.5} 1-hour average levels in the cooler months in 2012 and in warmer months during 2013 to 2015.

Action 2. The OEH to note, in future seasonal air quality presentations, the relevant air quality events that may have influenced the statistics for usage of the air quality monitoring web pages and air quality alert subscriptions, where possible.

Action 3. The EPA to email to the committee members the graphs, presented by the OEH at the meeting, showing the annual average concentrations for PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}, compared with annual criteria.

Action 4. The OEH to report, in future air quality seasonal newsletters, the rolling annual average concentrations for PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5} and comparisons with annual criteria.

8. EPA Upper Hunter Woodsmoke Reduction Program

The Upper Hunter Valley Fine Particle Characterisation Study 2012-2014 found that wood smoke contributed more particles than industry and vehicles in the cooler months of May to October when PM_{2.5} levels were highest in Singleton and Muswellbrook.

Ms Young and Ms Kanoush presented the findings of the Upper Hunter Wood Smoke Community Attitudes Research Project, undertaken in July to October 2015.

The study involved (1) exploring community attitudes, with four focus groups and 10 stakeholder interviews; (2) measuring the incidence of those attitudes, with telephone surveys of 200 wood heater users; and (3) assessing the potential for intervention approaches, with two groups of town-based wood heater users.

The study identified preferred strategies for reducing wood smoke: educating for cleaner burning; raising awareness of the health benefits from change; providing good evidence for the benefits; and promoting sharing of information among peer groups.

The study also found that the local press provided the best way to reach wood heater users in the Upper Hunter and that local councils provide the best source of follow up information and services.

The OEH noted that the results of the Upper Hunter air quality monitoring network provided a means of following trends in PM_{2.5} levels. The EPA in liaison with local councils will keep the committee informed of further work reducing wood smoke emissions.

Action 5. The EPA to email to the committee the slides on the EPA's Upper Hunter Wood Smoke Community Attitudes Research, presented at the meeting.

9. EPA update on Dust Stop program and optimising mine operated air quality monitoring

The EPA Dust Stop program required Hunter Valley coal mines to undertake a series of pollution reduction programs (PRPs) to reduce fugitive dust emissions from mining activity.

- PRP 1 required mines operations to achieve 80% control of wheel generated dust
- PRP 2 required mines to modify operations in adverse weather, that is, conditions most likely to increase dust
- PRP 3 required mines to investigate dust reduction when handling overburden, that is the rock material overlying the coal seams
- PRP 4 required mines to estimate their surface areas exposed to wind erosion.

The EPA is investigating ways of standardising the triggers for recognising adverse weather and the mines' responses. The EPA has engaged the OEH to identify the key weather parameters on days that generate adverse dust levels.

Following the establishment of the Upper Hunter Air Quality Monitoring Network (UHAQMN), which provided continuous data on air quality experienced in smaller communities and larger population centres, the EPA and the Department of Planning committed to a review of existing air monitoring by mines. The review presented an opportunity to update monitoring techniques and move the focus of mine-operated monitoring, away from monitoring of particle levels near receiver populations, towards monitoring the changes in particle levels upwind and downwind of mining activity. Continuous monitoring of PM₁₀ to the northwest and southeast of each mine, aligned with the dominant wind directions in the valley, would allow quantification of the mine's individual contributions to particle levels. The EPA intends to use the information to guide regulatory action to reduce levels during adverse weather conditions. The EPA has send draft notices to the licensees for the mines, proposing the change to monitoring conditions on environment protections licences, to require monitoring of upwind and downwind PM₁₀ levels. The EPA will attend the mine's community consultative committees to discuss the detail of the changes.

Mr Tate commended the cooperative approach demonstrated by the EPA, the Department of Planning and the mines to improving air quality.

Action 6. The EPA will keep the Committee informed on actions to reduce mining dust emissions and to optimise mine-operated monitoring.

10. Committee Evaluation and Feedback

In October 2015, the EPA developed a protocol to evaluate the EPA's consultative committees. The protocol aligned with the outcomes of the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into the Performance of EPA in February 2015, which recommended that the EPA ensured its committees had genuine participation and were evaluated transparently. The protocol proposed two surveys, to involve the Committees members and the range of people engaged by the Committees. The feedback would assist in improving the roles of the Committees and improving the EPA's performance in community engagement. The EPA invited Committee members in the previous term to complete the first survey.



The EPA planned that the second survey, later in 2016, would involve people in the Committee members' contact networks.

The EPA thanked Committee members for responding to the survey and tabled the draft report, the *Upper Hunter Air Quality Advisory Committee, Evaluation and Survey, October 2015* and the transcripts of the previous Committee members' responses. The respondents' names were not included in the transcripts.

The EPA invited feedback on the draft report, noting the final version would be published on the EPA website.

Mr Tate commended the EPA, the process and the participants.

Action 7. UHAQAC members to review the draft report *Upper Hunter Air Quality Advisory Committee, Evaluation and Survey, October 2015*, considering its readability and to send feedback to the EPA, by email, by 5 pm Friday 26 February 2016.

11. Committee Procedures and Priorities in 2016

Mr Tate reiterated that the Committee's Terms of Reference guided its core business. A priority for the Committee in its previous term had been to raise community awareness of the results of the monitoring network. This led to the development of air quality newsletters to provide key messages on seasonal trends on air quality for publication and circulation to the media.

On Committee procedures, Mr Tate encouraged members to reach consensus decisions. Where consensus could not be reached, he would call for a vote. Members were welcome to express dissenting views and have these minuted.

In media liaison, only the Chair would speak on behalf of the Committee. While members have the right to express personal opinions outside of the Committee, including to the media, they cannot speak on behalf of the Committee. Any comments by the Chair on behalf of the Committee would be based on the contents of the minutes of meetings.

Members may forward agenda items to the EPA, for the Chair's consideration. The Chair would allow matters to be brought to the committee where the issues were within the scope of the Terms of Reference. If the matter was not considered to be within the Terms of Reference, it could be referred to the EPA for consideration. A template for proposing agenda papers was provided.

12. General Business

Ms MacBain asked how relevant stakeholders could raise community awareness about mine closure plans, for ongoing dust management on mine sites in the care and maintenance phase.

Action 8. The EPA to investigate appropriate means of raising community awareness of the ongoing dust management required by mine closure plans.

Mr Tate thanked the Committee, the OEHL and the EPA for their participation and contributions.

Meeting closed at 1.05 pm

Next meeting date: 28 April 2016. Minutes for review by: John Tate (Chair).