
UPPER HUNTER AIR QUALITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE (UHAQAC)

MEETING MINUTES – Meeting 18

Date: 29 October 2015

Time: 11:00am – 2:30 pm

File: EF13/5718, DOC15/494410-03

Meeting Location: Glencore Ravensworth Mine

In attendance: John Tate (Chairperson), Cr Wayne Bedggood, Scott Brooks, Dr Catherine Chicken, Dr Craig Dalton, John Krey Geoffrey Sharrock, Andrew Speechly, John Watson, Nick Woodard (Work Experience, Department of Planning) and Eddie Love (Muswellbrook Shire Council).

Ravensworth Mine officers: Andrew Kelly (Environment and Community Manager), Brendan Gazzard (Health, Safety and Compliance Manager), Murray Gregson (Mining Manager), Greg Newton (Environment and Community Coordinator) and Clint Weatherall (Environment and Community Officer).

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

Environment Protection Authority (EPA): Mitchell Bennett, Michael Howat, Leanne Graham

Apologies: Morgana Gidley-Baird (AGL Macquarie), Adam Gilligan (EPA), Cr Hollee Jenkins and Lyn MacBain (Muswellbrook Council)

Absent: Wendy Wales

Agenda Item:

Acknowledgement of Country

1. Welcome and Introductions

Mr Tate opened the meeting and welcomed attendees.

2. Apologies (see above)

3. Overview of Ravensworth Mine Site

Mr Kelly welcomed the Committee to the Glencore Ravensworth Open Cut Mine (ROC) and Mr Gazzard, Health and Safety Training Manager, conducted an induction session.

Mr Kelly presented an overview of mining operations. The ROC complex lies between Muswellbrook and Singleton and comprises open cut operations, coal preparation and washing facility and an underground mine which is currently in care and maintenance. Mining commenced at Ravensworth Operations in the 1970's. The open cut operations now produce approximately 12 million tonnes per annum, with 80% thermal coal and 20% semi-soft coking coal. The operations are approximately 270 metres deep and three kilometres wide. Mining methods include hydraulic shovels, excavators and dump trucks. All coal is exported through the port of Newcastle. The mine is expected to operate under the current approval for at least another 25 years.

Mr Kelly described and outlined the dust management practices. Twelve video surveillance cameras, positioned around the site, continuously monitor dust generation and mitigation practices. Water carts are used to reduce dust from haul roads. A fogging system is being trialled. Operations are also ceased during adverse weather conditions to minimise potential dust emissions.

4. Tour of 24/7 dispatch area including cameras

The Committee viewed the video surveillance cameras and the site dispatch performance monitoring control room. Operators in the control room use the live feed cameras and GPS tracking software to monitor all activities.

5. Site tour to view dust mitigation practices.

The Committee viewed open cut mining operations from an observation point at the northern end of the operational pit, approximately 270 metres above the active pit floor. Mr Gregson explained the various mining activities, identifying excavating, trucking and blast loading practices on the pit floor and at various bench heights. He noted the dyke of igneous rock, cutting across the pit. The group observed water carts spraying the haul roads in various areas of the pit. Mr Gregson explained that the excavations would move southward, backfilling progressively and eventually leaving an approved final void. Rehabilitation included shaping of waste emplacement areas and water management structures and revegetation using endemic species.

6. Shared observations from site tour

The Chair opened the discussion, commending the impressive effort and technology involved in the environmental management of mining that had been observed onsite.

Dr Chicken asked whether the proactive practices viewed onsite were the benchmark across the valley. Mr Watson believed that most sites were improving as the approval process required better environmental performance and modern practices such as the use of real time air quality monitoring. The EPA's introduction of pollution reduction programs across the industry had raised the standard of environmental performance. The NSW Minerals Council's Upper Hunter Mining Dialogue had created industry wide dust forecasting for companies to plan their own daily mining activities.

The Chair noted that the wider community would benefit from a better understanding of the environmental performance of mines.

7. Previous Meeting Minutes and Actions

The Committee members agreed to adopt the draft minutes of the meetings of 30 April 2015 and 30 July 2015 as true and accurate records.

8. Air Quality in the Upper Hunter: Winter 2015

Mr Betts (OEH) presented the winter 2015 seasonal report on the Upper Hunter Air Quality Monitoring Network. Mr Betts noted the revised, simplified format. Key points included:

- From 1 June 2015 to 31 August 2015, the air quality in the Upper Hunter was generally good.
- There were no days above the benchmark concentrations for PM_{2.5} particles, nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and sulfur dioxide (SO₂).
- The daily average PM₁₀ particle level was above the 50 µg/m³ benchmark on one day. Camberwell recorded 51.4 µg/m³ on 22 August. This coincided with a widespread elevated particle levels in the Lower Hunter, most likely due to fires near Buchanan.
- The daily average PM_{2.5} particle level was above the 25 µg/m³ benchmark on three days. Muswellbrook recorded 31.2 µg/m³ on 14 June, 27.3 µg/m³ on 21 July and 26.7 µg/ on 22 July 2015.
- The pollution rose has been included in response to a previous request from the committee.
- The Upper Hunter region experienced 'average' to 'below average' rainfall during winter 2015, which was similar to the previous three years.

In response to previous requests from the committee, Mr Betts noted the following:

- The new format of the report included the seasonal PM₁₀ pollution rose map, which showed that elevated hourly PM₁₀ levels occurred infrequently at Upper Hunter sites during winter 2015. There are no standards for hourly PM₁₀ in the National Environment Protection (Ambient Air Quality) Measure (Air NEPM).
- The report included an explanation of the terms used to classify of air quality monitoring sites.
- Year to date (January to August 2015) PM_{2.5} averages were as follows:
 - Singleton: 7.7 µg/m³
 - Muswellbrook: 9.3 µg/m³
 - Camberwell: 7.3 µg/m³
- Public use of web pages associated with air quality monitoring data peaked in August 2015.

The committee discussed various means of improving community awareness, understanding and use of online air quality monitoring data. Mr Love noted that local councils were moving away from purpose-based community workshops and looking to engage the community at other established events. Mr Sharrock suggested a committee meeting might be opened to the public, with a community workshop to follow.

The Chair concluded that these matters were worth further discussion in future Committee meetings.

Recommendation 1: The OEH publishes the annual and seasonal air quality reports as soon as practicable.

Recommendation 2: The EPA and OEH improve the means and the speed with which the key messages in the seasonal reports are provided to the community and the media, for example, online YouTube and video messages.

9. EPA update on optimising coal mine operated air quality monitoring for better dust management

This agenda item was held over to a future meeting.

10. EPA consultation on the NSW Draft Industrial Noise Guideline

Mr Downey (EPA) outlined the review of the Industrial Noise Policy and the main changes proposed in the Draft Industrial Noise Guideline. Key points included:

- The draft guideline updates and clarifies the methods for assessing and managing noise from large industrial developments, including mines.
- The proposed changes address issues identified by the EPA and other users over the 15 years of the current policy's operation, as well as new research. The review was assisted by an interagency steering group comprising the EPA, NSW Health and the Department of Planning and Environment.
- The main users of the guideline will be:
 - Proponents and operators of industrial developments and associated noise consultants.
 - Planning authorities.
 - Regulatory authorities.
- The draft guideline sets out:
 - Noise levels against which noise impacts are evaluated.
 - Procedures for predicting noise impacts.
 - Procedures for setting strategies and options to reduce noise impacts.
 - Steps for setting achievable noise limits.
- The proposed changes include:
 - New terms, e.g. the term 'criterion' is now referred to as either the 'project amenity noise level' or the 'project intrusive noise level' and the 'project-specific noise level' is now referred to as the 'project noise trigger level'.
 - The meaning of noise 'trigger levels' has been clarified. These are noise levels that, if exceeded, indicate the need to consider noise mitigation measures to the extent that is practical.
 - The project noise trigger level is the more stringent value of:
 - The intrusiveness noise level, which protects the community from significant changes in noise levels, by limiting the extent to which a noise can exceed the background level.
 - The project amenity noise level, which preserves the community amenity by providing an overall cap on noise levels for different landuse types.
 - The minimum background level for the daytime period has been raised from 30 to 35 dB(A) resulting in an increase in the minimum daytime intrusive noise level from 35 to 40 dB(A).

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- The 'noise management precinct' concept is introduced to assist managing impacts from multiple sources within one area. It allows noise reductions at existing industrial premises to be considered as a mitigation measure for a new premises.
 - A maximum noise level event assessment for sleep disturbance is now incorporated into the guideline.
 - Noise levels greater than 5 dB(A) above the noise limits under meteorological conditions used in the assessment will be applied as an upper cap under all meteorological conditions.
- The process for evaluating industrial noise ensures that new or modified industrial premises are designed to satisfy noise goals where feasible and reasonable or emit the lowest possible noise levels that can be achieved.

Mr Downey advised the Committee that consultation packages, including summaries and questions and answer sheets, were available on the EPA web site at:

<https://engage.environment.nsw.gov.au/draftiindustrial-noise-guideline>

The EPA invited submission, online, by email or by post, before the consultation process closed on 13 November 2015.

Mr Krey asked why the change in name from 'policy' to 'guideline'. Mr Downey replied that 'guideline' clarified that the role of the document in the planning approval process. The guideline does not set enforceable conditions. The assessment of an environmental impact statement, by a planning authority, in accordance with the guideline, would lead to a set of enforceable conditions for a development.

Mr Krey expressed his concern that the role of the guideline should be to protect the community which should not be subject to economic constraints. He advised that he would make a submission.

Dr Dalton noted that a review of international practice found that the development approval process in the United States of America was moving towards greater consideration of community-prepared impact statements, compared to proponent-prepared impact assessments.

The Chair thanked Mr Downey for the presentation.

11. Evaluation and Achievements of the Committee 2013-2015

The EPA thanked Committee members for responding to the evaluation survey. The feedback would assist in improving the role of the Committee and improving the EPA's performance in community engagement.

The EPA invited submissions on the summary document which outlined the establishment, scope and functions, committee procedures and priorities and achievements of the Committee since its inception in 2009.

The Chair commended the process and thanked Committee members for their contributions.



12. General Business

The Chair thanked the Committee members for their participation and contribution during this term of office. He encouraged the members to feel satisfied with the Committee's work to improve the ways that the community is kept informed on air quality. He hoped that the members had reapplied to continue the good work of the Committee in the next two-year term.

The Chair thanked the EPA for its work with the Committee in during the current term.

Meeting closed at 2.35 pm

Next meeting date: to be advised.

Minutes for review by: John Tate (Chair).