

MEETING MINUTES

Date: 17 May 2012

Time: 10:00am – 12 noon

File: FIL08/6990-09

Meeting Location: Singleton.

Meeting 7 of the Upper Hunter Air Quality Monitoring Network (UHAQMN) – Advisory Committee

In attendance: Cathy Cole (Chairperson), Martin Addinall, Scott Brooks, Wayne Bedggood, Craig Dalton, Craig Flemming, Lyn MacBain, Kenneth McDonald, Patrice Newell, Carol Russell, Andrew Speechly, Wendy Wales, John Watson.

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

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

Apologies: Rory Gordon (Andrew Speechly replacing); John Neely (Martin Addinall replacing).

Agenda Item:

- 1. Acknowledgement of Country**
- 2. Apologies (see above)**
- 3. Previous Meeting Minutes and Actions**

The Advisory Committee adopted the minutes from the meeting held 17 November 2011.

EPA advised that the potential to modify the network in response to changes in the mining industry would be discussed at a future meeting.

OEH confirmed that the Upper Hunter Air Quality Monitoring Network Draft *Interim Performance Report: December 2010 - August 2011* incorporated feedback from the committee. OEH noted that future reporting timeframes would be discussed in Agenda Item 6.

4. Progress Report

OEH completed construction of the air quality monitoring network in December 2011. Data recording at the Merriwa monitoring site commenced in February 2012, following a power supply upgrade. The network continuously measures particles (as PM₁₀), wind speed and wind direction at all 14 monitoring sites, finer particles (as PM_{2.5}) at Singleton, Muswellbrook and Camberwell and sulfur dioxide and oxides of nitrogen at Singleton and Muswellbrook.

Air quality results are available from the OEH website at:

<http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/aqms/uhunteraqmap.htm>

OEH advised that the monitoring network also provides a platform for specialised research studies. These include:

- A jointly funded OEH/NSW Health study, being undertaken by CSIRO and ANSTO, using specialised equipment located at the Singleton and Muswellbrook. This 12 month study commenced in January 2012 and will investigate the composition of fine particles, their sources and their relative contributions.
- A study by NSW Health that commenced in May 2011 to measure fine particle concentrations for future population exposure assessments and to test whether the spatial variation in fine particles (PM_{2.5}) is small enough that it can be characterised by three monitoring sites (Singleton, Muswellbrook and Camberwell).

OEH answered questions from Committee members who requested details on the studies, the participating organisations, the network and the monitoring instruments.

The Committee noted the report and OEH to regularly communicate study results.

ACTION 1: OEH to provide to the Committee a photograph of the Muswellbrook monitoring station with labels identifying specific instruments and equipment.

5. System Performance

OEH outlined system performance and summary monitoring results for particulate matter for the period 1 September 2011 to 30 April 2012. OEH noted that summary results for SO₂ and NO₂ at Singleton and Muswellbrook would be circulated as an addendum. OEH reported that the network is regularly providing valid and accurate particle, wind speed and direction data in excess of 95% of the time.

OEH explained that specific system outages and technical issues typically cause data gaps in the early stages of system establishment. For example, a temporary loss of power supply occurred at Mount Thorley during December 2011. Power outages result in data loss and gaps in the database. However, the system stores data during periods of routine maintenance, or telecommunications failure, and uploads the data when web site resumes operation. The system automatically calibrates instruments for measuring nitrogen dioxide and sulfur dioxide, daily at 1:00 am to 2:00 am, resulting in a data gap.

The Committee discussed the substances, standards and local conditions measured by the Upper Hunter network. Some community members have advised that there is a contrast between the air pollution levels reported by the network and observed local visibility or eye irritations and odours.

EPA clarified that conditions of reduced visibility are not always associated with airborne particles. OEH clarified that some air monitoring stations in the Sydney region use nephelometers, which measure reduced-visibility due to light scattering. The OEH one-hour visibility goal corresponds to a visual distance of approximately 9 kilometres. The Upper Hunter network, by design, aims to measure health-related particle impacts rather than visibility which is an aesthetic issue,

In response to the discussion, NSW Health briefly outlined procedures for setting health based air quality standards and reassured the Committee that the international scientific community constantly reviews air quality standards.

EPA concluded that it would respond to any emerging trends in the air quality of the Upper Hunter that are identified by the network. Access to the findings of the scientific studies will increase the understanding of EPA/OEH regarding the processes driving the long term air quality trends.

Chair noted that the Committee could contribute by advising the EPA on its future responses to long term trends in the monitoring results

6. Reporting Timeframes

Traditionally, OEH reports regional air quality annually, from January to December. OEH clarified that Upper Hunter reporting timeframes and formats may evolve over time depending on community feedback.

The Committee endorsed the format of the OEH *Interim Performance Report* for the Upper Hunter, including the case studies which interpret local events and help raise the community's understanding of local air quality issues and the role of the network.

The Committee discussed the feasibility of snapshot summary communications during the year to maintain community awareness of the network.

The committee recommended that future reporting on the outcomes of the air quality monitoring network comprise:

- An interim report on the results to 30 June 2012
- A comprehensive annual report for calendar years commencing with 2012.

7. Media Clippings

EPA distributed recent media articles related to the network.

8. General Business

EPA advised that it is developing a mechanism to replace the Deed of Agreement (due to expire in December 2012), which formalises the ongoing management, funding and public reporting processes for the network. The Regulation requires Ministerial approval. EPA noted that the next meeting (Meeting 8) will include an agenda item to discuss the ongoing regulation of the network.

The Committee discussed various issues with the functionality of the website and alert subscription system, OEH agreed to review the functionality of the webpage and to inform subscribers of the need to update subscription details to receive alerts from the more recently commissioned sites.

The Chair encouraged the Committee to remind local community members, especially those who may be susceptible to health impacts related to air quality, to subscribe to the alert service.

Next meeting date:

Thursday 11 October 2012

Minutes Reviewed by: Cathy Cole (Chair)