
UPPER HUNTER AIR QUALITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE (UHAQAC)

MEETING MINUTES – Meeting 24

Date: 25 May 2017

Time: 10:00am – 1:00 pm

File: EF13/5718, DOC17/397348-01

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

In attendance: John Tate (Chair), Mayor Wayne Bedggood, Dr Catherine Chicken, Diane Gee, Lindy Hyam, Chris Knight, John Krey, Matthew Parkinson, Cr Danny Thompson, Andrew Speechly, John Watson

Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH): Matt Riley, Scott Thompson, Loredana Warren

Environment Protection Authority (EPA): Clair Cameron, Emma Coombs, Karen Marler Leanne Graham.

Apologies: Dr Craig Dalton, Morgana Gidley-Baird, Ben Harrison, Lyn MacBain, Geoffrey Sharrock, Mitchell Bennett (EPA)

Absent: Mark Scandrett

Acknowledgement of Country

Agenda Item:

1. Welcome and Introductions

Mr Tate welcomed attendees.

2. Apologies

See above.

3. Review of the Upper Hunter Air Quality Monitoring Network

Mr Riley presented the draft report on the first five-year review of the Upper Hunter Air Quality Monitoring Network (UHAQMN). Key points included the following.

- The draft report by the OEH presented evidence to demonstrate how the Upper Hunter monitoring program achieved the four objectives set by the Protection of the Environment Operations (General) Regulation 2009.
- The independent reviewer found the monitoring program efficient and cost-effective.
- The draft report proposed improvements to the monitoring program.
- The final report will incorporate feedback from stakeholders, including any additional considerations for the monitoring program over the next five years. The meeting debated whether strategies by government and industry had improved local air quality. Mr Riley encouraged the Committee members to consult with their stakeholders and gather feedback on the draft report.

The meeting discussed whether the final report would be strengthened by including a statement addressing the independent reviewer's potential conflict of interest, as a user of network data and a client of the OEH.

The Chair and the Committee commended the OEH on the draft report.

Action 1. The EPA will seek, collate and circulate stakeholder feedback on the Upper Hunter air quality monitoring program, in liaison with the Committee and report to OEH by 30 June 2017.

Recommendation 1. The Committee recommended that the report included a statement from the independent reviewer addressing a potential conflict of interest.

4. Upper Hunter Air Quality Report and Seasonal Analysis Summer 2016

Ms Warren presented the draft *Upper Hunter Air Quality Newsletter, Summer 2016-17*

- Air quality levels were generally good in terms of the NSW Air Quality Index.
- Levels of NO₂, PM_{2.5} were below benchmarks.
- Muswellbrook recorded a peak in the hourly SO₂ concentration, at 21 parts per hundred million (pphm), at 8:00 am on 23 December 2016, exceeding the 20 pphm national benchmark. This was the first time since 1994 that the NSW air quality monitoring network recorded an SO₂ level above the national benchmark. The major source of SO₂ emissions in the Upper Hunter is electricity generation. On 23 December 2016, stable atmospheric conditions and a light south easterly breeze potentially limited dispersion of power stations emissions.
- In summer 2016–17, periods with below average rainfall, above average temperatures and higher wind speeds were associated with elevated PM₁₀ levels, especially during bush fires and hazard reduction burning.
- Levels of PM₁₀ were below the daily benchmark of 50 µg/m³, except on 12 days, when levels ranged from 52.1 to 82.1 µg/m³. Summer 2016-17 recorded the most days above the PM₁₀ benchmark, compared to the previous four summers. The increase in summer 2016-2017 reflected hot dry winds, combined with bushfires.
 - The larger population sites of Singleton, Muswellbrook and Aberdeen each recorded one day above the PM₁₀ benchmark. OEH classified these days as exceptional events, due to the effects of bushfire smoke.
 - The smaller community sites at Warkworth and Wybong recorded one day above the PM₁₀ benchmark and Maison Dieu recorded two days.
 - Monitoring stations close to coal mines recorded days above the PM₁₀ benchmark, at Camberwell (11 days), Mount Thorley (six days), Singleton NW (three days) and Muswellbrook NW (one day).

The Committee discussed factors influencing elevated particle levels. OEH noted the low particle levels during Christmas periods, in all years since the Network was established.

The Committee endorsed the final draft *Upper Hunter Air Quality Monitoring Network Seasonal Newsletter, Summer 2016-2017*, for publication on the OEH website.

Mr Tate thanked Ms Warren and commended the draft seasonal newsletter.

5. EPA update on Stakeholder Engagement Survey 2016-17

Ms Cameron presented an overview of Stakeholder Engagement Survey 2016-17, the second major survey by IPSOS for the EPA. Key points included the following.

- The survey gathered feedback from over 500 participants, more than four times as many people than the first survey in 2013.
- Stakeholders included community advisory and consultative committees, environment groups, local government, EPA licensees regulated by environmental legislation and non-licensed businesses as well as some callers to EPA Environment Line
- The most significant finding was the overall increased satisfaction with the level of performance of the EPA in total and among all groups surveyed.
- Stakeholders most satisfied with the performance of the EPA were local government and industry.
 - Overall, all groups saw an improvement in satisfaction with the EPA's communication methods
 - It was noted that the respondents rated air quality, odours and dust as a high priority, and high performance.

The Committee discussed opportunities for improving the EPA's engagement with Upper Hunter communities and environment groups, including the role of local newspapers.

Action 2. The EPA will inform the Committee of publication of the EPA Stakeholder Survey 2016-17.

Action 3. The EPA and the Committee will discuss new approaches to engaging with Upper Hunter communities to discuss local air quality issues.

Mr Tate thanked Ms Cameron for the presentation and commended the EPA Stakeholder Survey.

6. EPA update on Optimisation of Mine-Operated Monitoring

Ms Coombs recapped the background, principles and progress of the EPA's program to optimise mine site air quality monitoring. Key points included the following.

- The government-operated, industry-funded UHAQMN provided continuous air quality monitoring near communities to protect human health. In negotiating the establishment of the UHAQMN, the EPA and the Department of Planning and Environment (DPE) committed to reviewing the requirements for mine-operated monitoring on mines' Environment Protection Licences (EPLs).
- The EPA and DPE worked with each mine to replace numerous older dust monitors with two continuous PM₁₀ monitors. The two new monitoring locations align with the dominant NW-SE wind direction and the extremities of mining activity.
- The optimisation of mine-operated monitoring also requires the mine to measure its contribution to PM₁₀ levels, upwind and downwind of mining activity.
- The EPA recently finalised the new EPL monitoring requirements with 17 mines.

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- The EPA will use the results of mine-operated PM₁₀ monitoring to improve dust regulation and minimise dust generation from mining activity across the Upper Hunter.

Action 4. The EPA will provide updates to the Committee on the results of mine operated PM₁₀ monitoring.

Mr Tate thanked Ms Coombs for the presentation.

7. Minutes of Previous Meeting, No. 23 of 23 February and Actions Arising

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

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

- The OEH presented the draft report on the five review of the Upper Hunter Air Quality Monitoring Network (refer to Item 3).
- The EPA will seek feedback from the Committee members and their contact groups, on the review the Upper Hunter Air Quality Monitoring Network (refer to Item 3).
- The EPA and OEH will report to the Committee on refinement of the Upper Hunter dust risk forecasting model, as information becomes available.
- Committee members provided feedback to the EPA, on Friday 10 March 2017, on the NSW Clean Air Consultation Paper. The EPA will invite Committee members to the NSW Clean Air Summit, to be held in Sydney, on 27 June 2017.
- The EPA updated the Committee on the EPA's Stakeholder Survey 2016-17 (refer to Item 5).

8. Community Feedback

Mr Tate invited Committee members to share feedback from their contact networks.

Mr Parkinson responded to media reports on power station emissions and confirmed AGL meets pollution reporting requirements. AGL has improved efficiency by milling coal. Continuous stack monitoring at Bayswater's four units will be completed by June 2017.

Mr Krey commended the quality of information provided to the Committee. He proposed:

- Greater opportunities for the Committee to engage in two-way discussions with the EPA on reducing air emissions.
- Greater opportunities for the Committee to discuss contentious issues such as the recommendation for restrictions on the expansion of open cut mines.

Dr Chicken proposed that the EPA and the Committee plays a greater role in engaging with the wider community to discuss air quality management and emission reductions.

Ms Hyam advised that Ms Coombs presented the EPA's Dust Stop Program to Singleton Rotary Club, in April 2017. Ms Hyam proposed a greater role for the EPA and Committee in explaining to the wider community how policy makers use the Network data.

Mr Knight advised that DPE regularly refers to Network data with the following situations:

- Daily surveillance of air quality
- Responding to dust complaints

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- Investigating mining compliance following Network air quality alerts, and
 - Comparing air quality measurements with Jacobs' daily Hunter dust risk forecasts.

Mr Knight noted the potential role, in the next five years, for the air quality monitor at Muswellbrook NW, to measure impacts from Mount Pleasant and Dartbrook coal mines.

Cr Thompson proposed that the EPA and OEHL considered ways to inform senior high school students about the Network.

The Committee debated inviting media representatives to Committee meetings. Ms Cameron advised the EPA had arranged for the local media to interview the Chair after Committee meetings.

The Committee discussed how to raise issues for discussion at Committee meetings.

Action 5. The EPA to recirculate to the Committee a procedure for proposing agenda items and questions and for Committee meetings.

Ms Marler advised the Committee of the EPA's new focus on stakeholder engagement. For example, the EPA could facilitate and attend community meetings and report issues and questions to the Committee.

Action 6. The EPA and the Committee will discuss new approaches to engaging with Upper Hunter communities on local air quality issues, at the next meeting.

Action 7. The EPA will prioritise Community Feedback in future meeting agendas.

9. General Business

The Committee and the OEHL supported a request from Singleton Shire Council for the rescue helicopter use of the park in front of the Singleton air quality monitoring station as an emergency site.

The EPA circulated the forecast budget for the financial year 2017-18, for the operation of the Upper Hunter Air Quality Monitoring Network. The EPA proposed the forecast total cost, of \$694,213 for operation of the network, with levies on coal mines and power stations providing the forecast total income of \$694,123. The Committee endorsed the forecast budget for 2016-2017.

Meeting closed at 1.15 pm.

Next meeting date: Thursday 27 July 2017.

Minutes for review by: John Tate (Chair)