



Minutes

Meeting:	Upper Hunter Air Quality Advisory Committee (No 39)	Date:	Tuesday 23 November 2021
Location:	Online	Time:	10.00am - 11.20pm
Last Meeting Date:	Tuesday 24 August 2021	Next Meeting Date:	Tuesday 8 March 2022
	<p>John Turner – Chairperson John Krey – community representative Iain Hornshaw – coal industry representative Ned Stephenson – coal industry representative Tracy Ward – Muswellbrook Shire Council representative Jan Davis – environmental representative Summer Steward – power industry representative Matthew Riley – DPIE Margaret Haak – DPIE Dr Leanne Graham – DPIE Dr Stephen White – DPIE Sean Watt – DPIE David Gathercole – EPA, Director Regulatory Operations Metro North Jamie Ferguson – EPA, Stakeholder engagement</p>		
Apologies:	<p>Maurice Collison – Upper Hunter Shire Council representative Catherine Chicken – industry representative Gary Mulhearn – coal industry representative Cr Danny Thompson – Singleton Shire Council representative Maurice Collison – Upper Hunter Shire Council representative Dr Bob Vickers – community representative Wendy Wales – environmental representative Michael White – community representative Karen Gallagher – EPA, Unit Head Regulatory Operations Metro North Loredana Warren – DPIE</p>		

Agenda items:

1. Introduction

1.1. Welcome

The Chair opened the meeting at 10.03am.

1.2. Present, apologies and declarations of interest

The Chair welcomed the Upper Hunter Air Quality Advisory Committee (the Committee) and noted the apologies. There were no declarations of interest stated by any attendees.

2. Previous Minutes and Outstanding Actions

2.1. Review previous minutes

The previous minutes were adopted by Mr John Krey and Mr Ned Stephenson at this meeting.

2.2. Outstanding actions

There were no outstanding action items.

3. Presentation

3.1 Mr Mathew Riley climate report.

Mr Riley provided a summary presentation on climate change including greenhouse gases, global warming, predictions, along with associations to NSW strategy and policy initiatives.

Within the view that human influence has warmed the climate at an unprecedented rate in last 2000 years, the presentation covered:

- IPCC AR6 results, scenarios and findings including changes in weather and climate extremes
- The effects of climate change and IPCC's prediction of significant soil drying and more extreme weather events
- Anticipation that events will become more frequent e.g. 1 in 50-year event more likely to be 1 in 4-year event and that future emissions will cause future additional warming
- Highlighting the 'Regional fact sheet' specific to Australasia that listed common regional changes including projected changes in temperature and precipitation.

Mr Riley also mentioned the State's 2016 Net Zero Emissions by 2050 target and NSW Climate Change Policy Framework reiterating the scientific and technical basis. The 2021 near term target for a reduction in NSW greenhouse gas emissions was also covered and the projected (84%) renewable energy share, with regards to NSW electricity supply by 2032.

Mr Riley discussed the States NSW greenhouse gas emission projects and associated programs and policies in addition to the NSW Electric Vehicle Strategy.

In summation Mr Riley said there was work on the Hydrogen Strategy with improvements expected with the next update, and that a staged view and incremental approach, with yearly updates along with the every 3-year State of the Environment Report, are all a 'live issue' for NSW.

Mr John Krey requested a copy of the presentation.

Action Item No	Action	Person Responsible
1	Provide the committee with a copy of DPIE's 'Climate change in NSW – from Global to Local' presentation.	Matthew Riley

4. Department questions and updates – standing item

4.1. Q&A for Departments

The Chair invited questions or updates from representatives. No responses.

5. EPA Update – Regulatory Operations Metropolitan North – standing item

5.1. Mr David Gathercole

Adam Gilligan is currently away on a secondment. Mr David Gathercole introduced himself and expressed he was looking forward to working with the committee. Mr Gathercole also offered apologies on behalf of Karen Gallagher, EPA's Unit Head Regulatory Operations Metro North who was unable to attend the meeting.

Mr Gathercole discussed complaints the EPA received relating the dust in the Hunter Valley since the last committee meeting was held in August 2021. He advised that dust complaints are investigated and reviewed against the UHAQMN monitors and weather conditions at the time.

Key information

- Complaints by location: Cessnock LGA (2), Muswellbrook LGA (7) and Singleton LGA (12)
- Where there appears to be moderate to high readings on the network monitors (and the source of the dust is identified) additional information may be requested from the Licensee. E.g. requests for air quality monitoring data captured by licence points and actions taken by licensee to manage dust emissions.
- Wetter weather conditions, due to the La Nina weather system has assisted in managing dust emissions.
- This year the EPA hasn't co-ordinated a Bust the Dust Campaign, due to the predicted high rainfall conditions. However, they are continuing to monitor the weather and will respond if conditions are conducive to increased dust emissions.

Mr Gathercole noted the strategic approach the EPA is continuing to take towards dust management. He said that with the change in COVID-19 restrictions, the EPA is looking forward to having a physical presence (announced and unannounced surveillance).

5.2 EPA Roadshows Report

Mr Jamie Ferguson advised that over the past fortnight the EPA hosted two successful virtual Roadshow forums, one for Peak organisations and the other aimed towards individual community members and community interest groups. He advised that the EPA's CEO and members of the Executive team presented on the EPA's regulatory approach and strategic plan. He advised the committee the EPA also spoke about how to engage and contact the EPA on environmental issues. Mr Ferguson said that both sessions were well attended, with over 130 participants across the two events and that what was heard and responses to attendee questions would be published onto the EPA's webpage.

6. Network feedback – standing item

6.1. Mr John Krey

Mr Krey asked about the EPA's Air Quality Alerts received by the community through SMS messages. He stated that the community in the Upper Hunter had received approximately 100 this year, but in the Air Quality Quarterly Reports the alerts had not been mentioned.

Mr Gathercole acknowledged My Krey and commented that due to COVID-19, this hasn't helped with the EPA's ability to visit sites either announced or unannounced.

Mr Riley stated that there has been changes to the alerting protocols and that the PM10 is set at a national level and that his Department are aware and focussed on communications.

Mr Krey expressed the view that current communications is lacking and requested the topic around alerts be placed as a future agenda item to which Mr Gathercole agreed.

Action Item No	Action	Person Responsible
2	Topic of alerts be added to the committee agenda as a standing item	Jamie Ferguson

7. Upper Hunter Air Quality Monitoring Network Review

7.1. UHAQMN five-year review

Dr Leanne Graham provided a presentation on the purpose, scope and four main objectives of the review. They advised that Mr White would be presenting on the new Air Quality website later in the meeting, acknowledging that committee members had made valuable contributions.

The presentation included:

- What has been learned about Upper Hunter air quality including associated impacts on air quality e.g. dust
- An overview of the draft Report structure including conclusions and recommendations for improvements
- The effectiveness of the program in fulfilling its objectives
- Noting that the review will include an independent audit of the efficiency and cost effectiveness of the program
- Displaying the monitoring network infographic, recognising committee input into its development
- Communications channels and reach such as email, text and SMS alerts noting an increase in subscriptions and evidence of increased traffic during incidence peak periods
- Noted 2019 as an extreme period for high levels of particle pollution. Climate change is intensifying the hot, dry phases in natural climate variability. This can have a significant impact on air quality. This year air quality has been good, during a cool, wet climate phase.
- Discussed comparisons in air pollution levels at Network stations in the region, key findings, and notable improvements.

Dr Graham presented a timeline illustrating the process for producing the AQMN (and program) Audit and Report stating the committee's feedback on the network and on the report would be part of this process.

Dr Graham informed the committee an online feedback/survey would be forthcoming shortly, distributed through the EPA with a series of questions. A draft report on the UHAQMN five-year review will available at the next meeting in 2022.

Action Item No	Action	Person Responsible
3	UHAQMN five-year review feedback form to be circulated to committee.	Leanne Graham

8. Air Quality Monitoring Network Seasonal Newsletter – standing item

8.1. Winter 2021 Newsletter

Mr Sean Watt advised the committee he was filling in for Ms Loredana Warren and presented on the Winter 2021 seasonal newsletter, covering the following key points:

- Overall, air quality in Newcastle region was predominantly good in winter 2021
- Lowest rolling averages - annual average PM10 and PM2.5 the lowest since the beginning of the network, the previous annual average was the highest, due to the previous extensive bushfire activity
- Climate drivers were acknowledged as influencing conditions (For example, the extreme hot, dry conditions of spring-summer 2019-20 were driven by the dry phases of the Indian Ocean Dipole and the Southern Annular Mode, combined with a Sudden Stratospheric Warming over the South Pole. These three drivers were dominant, while the El Niño Southern Oscillation was in a neutral phase, of neither La Niña (cool, wet) nor El Niño (hot, dry). Hot, dry periods in the region were driven by El Niño previously (2015)).
- Expect cooler temperatures and increased chances of precipitation than average over the coming months, associated with La Niña.
- Significant improvement in particle levels over the last 12-months for the Upper Hunter region in this season
- Levels of PM2.5, NO₂, SO₂ and NH₃ remained below the benchmarks and assessment criteria throughout the season

- No exceedances of the PM10 standard, which also occurred in winter 2016. This was down from two days in winter 2020, 22 days in 2019 and 29 days in 2018.
- Of the 79 PM10 exceedance days during winter seasons since the Network began, 61 exceedance days occurred during drought.
- No exceedances of PM2.5 standard, which also occurred in 2016. This was down from 3 exceedance days in Winter 2020 and two days each in 2018 and 2019)
- Particle trends were within their historical range. Daily averages were towards the lower end of the range.
- The Upper Hunter region experienced below average rainfall overall during winter 2021. Winds were predominately from the north-west.
- This is the first season where SO₂ and NO₂ were benchmarked against the new standards.
- The target network performance is at least 95% available data for all parameters. All stations met targets for online performance except Merriwa, with some data loss due to either instrument faults or maintenance.

Action Item No	Action	Person Responsible
4	Winter 2021 Newsletter to be circulated to committee.	Sean Watt

9. Demonstration of DPIE Air Quality pilot website

9.1. Live Air Quality website

Dr Stephen White provided a live demonstration of the upgraded DPIE Air Quality website www.airquality.nsw.gov.au and discussed the page that was specific to the Upper Hunter, www.airquality.nsw.gov.au/upper-hunter.

Mr White thanked the committee members who had been involved previously in user testing as part of developing the updated website. He pointed out that the website aims to be more accessible, working across mobiles and desktops and to contain more timely information and data that can be filtered by date and time ranges.

Mr White showcased Muswellbrook and demonstrated how to locate monitoring stations on the map, explained the ratings, demonstrated how to read the data on the tables and how to view the graphs.

Mr White stated that committee feedback was highly encouraged as DPIE is still making changes so any user problems or ideas are welcomed. The committee was shown the online feedback widget on the website.

The Chair and Mr Ned Stephenson thanked Mr White for the presentation and stated that the website looked comprehensive.

Mr Riley also stated that the Department valued having received input from committee members.

Action Item No	Action	Person Responsible
5	Send information on how to view the website and how to provide user feedback	Stephen White

10. General Business

10.1. Other

Ms Jan Davis asked the question in Ms Wendy Wales absence, as to what's occurring in relation to PM1 reporting.

Mr Riley responded that measuring PM1, as ultra-fine particles is not simple. He commented that there are some instruments that measure PM1. However, there is no national standard against which measurements may be assessed. Based on existing advice, ultra-fine particles are probably less of a relevant focus or significant issue for the Upper Hunter region.

Mr Stephen White commented that it was likely reporting on PM1 would not see that much difference from PM10 and PM2.5. Mr Riley suggested that the smaller PMs are captured in PM10 and PM2.5 reporting. However, current reporting is geared towards larger mass (PM2.5).

Ms Davis responded that, PM1 can enter the body differently and that this is a concern and asked that this discussion be documented in the meeting minutes. The Chair acknowledged the request and advised the discussion would be reflected in the minutes.

Mr Jamie Ferguson enquired on behalf of Mr Michael White, if DPIE could provide an update on a letter sent to the Department earlier in 2021 seeking a study specific to Singleton and Muswellbrook. Mr Riley acknowledged receipt of the letter and apologised for the delayed in providing a formal response. He commented that this required looking at other sites required future consideration. He highlighted that the 5-year AQMN review was an opportunity for contributing feedback and was a mechanism that committee could utilise to put forward comments and request.

10.2. Next meeting date

Mr Ferguson advised the next meeting date is 8 March 2022. Mr Turner noted this is an amended date and closed the meeting at 11:25pm.