



Environment Protection Authority – UHAQAC Minutes

Today's Meeting Date:	Thursday 21 November 2019 (No 34)	Next meeting date:	NA
Meeting location:	Singleton	Last Meeting Date:	Thursday 25 July 2019 (No 33)
Meeting opened at:	10:00am	Meeting closed at:	12:00pm
Convenor	Jenny Lange	Minute Taker	Bianca Morton
Present:	<p>John Tate – Chair Geoff Sharrock – Community Representative Di Gee – Community representative Mayor Wayne Bedgood – Upper Hunter Shire Dr Catherine Chicken – Commerce/Industry Representative Chloe Christensen - Coal Mining Industry Representative John Krey – Community Representative Jenny Lange - EPA Bianca Morton – EPA Adam Gilligan - EPA Carolyn Walsh - EPA</p>		
Apologies:	<p>Carolyn Obrien - Muswellbrook Shire Council Loredana Warren – Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE) John Watson – Coal Mining Industry Representative Mitchell Bennett – EPA Dr Craig Dalton – Hunter New England Health Cr Danny Thompson – Singleton Shire Council</p>		

Adoption of minutes and review of actions arising				
No	Agenda Item	Action	Person Responsible	Completion Date
1.1	Acknowledgment of Country	The Chair acknowledged the traditional owners of the land on which the meeting was held.	Chair	21 Nov 2019
1.2	Adoption of previous minutes of meeting	<p>The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 25 July 2019 (No 33) were adopted with one change requested by Ms Cook out of session.</p> <p>The edit was read to the Committee, and it was noted that this was not what was said on the day. It was agreed the requested change would be added as a clarifying note.</p>	Committee	21 Nov 2019
Agenda items				
	Agenda Item	Notes	Action/Decision	Status
2.3	DPIE presentation on Autumn 19 Air Quality Report	<p>Ms Morton provided the results of the Upper Hunter Air Quality Monitoring Network during Winter 2019, on behalf of (and requested by) Ms Warren in her absence.</p> <p>Ms Morton highlighted to the group that any questions or comments on the report or presentation would be recorded, and provided to Ms Warren, for her response back to the Committee (Action 1).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upper Hunter had below to very much below average rainfall. Daytime temperatures were highest on record and night-time temperatures were generally average. NO₂ and SO₂: No days over the benchmarks. PM_{2.5}: Two days over the benchmark on 2 June at Muswellbrook and 8 June at Muswellbrook and Singleton, likely due to woodsmoke, with elevated levels from late evening to early morning on cold days under calm, variable conditions. PM₁₀: 22 days over the benchmark: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No days at Bulga, Wybong and Merriwa (however no data available during eight days in August), and up to 16 days at Camberwell. This is less than winter 2018 but more than earlier winters 2012 to 2017. Most extensive event was from 8 to 9 August, an exceptional event due to long-range dust and local dust sources. 	Action 1 Ms Morton to provide comments to Loredana Warren, on behalf of the Committee, with feedback on her presentation and report.	

- Seven stations were over the benchmark on 8 August (including Aberdeen and Muswellbrook) and ten stations on 9 August (including Aberdeen and Singleton).
- Dust was transported from South Australia and travelled through central and northern NSW during the passage of two fronts.
- At the larger population sites there were additional days over the PM₁₀ benchmark at:
 - Muswellbrook on 19 August due to long-range dust transport.
 - Aberdeen on 23 August potentially due to local dust sources.

See [report](#) for more information.

Dr Chicken expressed disappointment that on the days where there were higher peaks, Merriwa station was down. She highlighted that there needs to be this data to see the influence of external impacts. Variation in the monitors helps to determine what is happening in the valley, and whether it is local sources.

She also highlighted that the area is becoming un-liveable, and that the air shed does not allow for external events, because it is already at capacity. She added that drought and dry conditions are now a new normal for the region, and that needs to be factored into decision making.

Mr Krey added that when looking at the report, it appears that everything is okay, but there have been up to 600 alerts already this year. The industrial impacts need to be highlighted as well. External impacts are highlighted multiple times throughout the report, whereas industry is only mentioned once. He acknowledged that there are external impacts, but that dust is also picking up momentum as it travels down the valley from local sources.

Dr Chicken agreed and added that the report needs to provide a clearer view of what is happening in the valley.

Mr Gilligan added that the report could set the baseline, to make it clearer to the reader what is happening. It is important to be able to understand the alerts and distinguish between days of dust events when multiple alerts are received, versus those that are triggered by local sources.

Mr Krey added that the dust was assessed at his property, and it was 25% coal. It is not just soil.

		<p>Dr Chicken also added that health impacts are a serious concern to the community, and it is difficult to assess as the population is not big enough for health impact studies. The community feels like they are not important.</p> <p>Mr Krey added that the mines should be put under the same restrictions as the power industry.</p> <p>Mr Sharrock agreed with this. He also added that he attended the Upper Hunter Mining Dialogue that week, and had some interesting information provided to him. It included information on air quality impacts, and that levels are going up across the State, not just in the Upper Hunter.</p> <p>It was agreed that Ms Morton would provide feedback to Ms Warren on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • including the alerts in the reports to provide the community with a better understanding of what is happening with air quality in the Upper Hunter; and • local sources need to be included as much as external sources. 		
2.4	<p>EPA update:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bust the Dust campaign • continuous ambient air quality monitoring • community drop in event 	<p>Ms Lange provided a presentation on Bust the Dust campaign.</p> <p>Ms Lange provided an overview of Bust the Dust</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • additional inspections of mines during spring, on hot dry and windy days. Checking extra controls are in place. • EPA staff monitor wind and weather conditions and select the worst days for inspection. Tweets are used to keep the community informed, and drones are used to see over trees, bunds and ridges to improve line of sight. • 11 inspections so far, with 25 observations of mines. All observations have been made off premises, using the drone where possible. • Findings are that mines are generally doing the right thing, haul roads are wet, limiting and stopping operations, operating drill rigs correctly, and observed blasts have been managed appropriately. <p>Ms Lange then showed drone footage of mines watering roads, and dust blowing off mines from exposed areas.</p> <p>She then advised that dust has been seen blowing off premises from exposed areas and showed footage of dust blowing off exposed areas. Ms Lange also showed video footage of operational</p>		

		<p>equipment shut down, but dust still blowing off site. She highlighted that in this instance, although dust is coming off the mine, the mine is not breaching their licence conditions.</p> <p>She also added that this is why video footage is so important, because a photo can give a different impression. But when investigating, the mine would confirm that they were not operating, so no legal action could be taken.</p> <p>Ms Walsh added that although this type of information cannot be used to prove licence breaches, it can be used to inform Government more broadly to help make decisions.</p> <p>Ms Lange highlighted some challenges of the campaign. The drone could not be used on four days due to windy weather. Dust storms and fires have also impacted the campaign.</p> <p>Mr Krey added, with respect to overburden and exposed areas, that older areas will form a crust on top of the soil, so the dust is more likely coming from recently exposed areas.</p> <p>Mr Gilligan added that this is usually the case, however that crust is usually formed from water, and there has not been a lot of rain, which will decrease crusting and increase the chance of dust from all areas.</p> <p>Mr Tate highlighted that this Committee is the conduit to provide this information to the decision makers, so they can make changes. He highlighted this is more valuable than headlines.</p> <p>Dr Chicken added that she believes it sometimes takes a headline to get people to notice. She understands the Committee must follow process, there are processes we must go through however we have been going through those processes for a long time, and now we need to do more.</p> <p>Mr Bedggood suggested further discussion of the ongoing validity and purpose of the Committee during general business.</p> <p>Dr Chicken asked whether there would be a summer program, like this spring program.</p> <p>Mr Gilligan said his team is reviewing the program to determine what a summer program should look like, but he can say that something will be occurring.</p>		
--	--	--	--	--

		<p>Mr Tate asked whether the general public know about the drone use. Ms Lange confirmed that they do.</p> <p>Ms Lange continued with her presentation on continuous ambient air quality monitoring (outstanding Action item 5, from previous meeting).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The question from the Committee was “can a benchmark similar to the DPIE benchmark be used when reporting compliance monitoring?”• Downtime for quality assurance requirements are not non-compliances for reporting purposes.• All other down-time such as breakdowns and repairs must be reported as a non-compliance. <p>Dr Chicken asked what the down-time is.</p> <p>Ms Lange responded that it varies between monitors and would depend on the type of monitor, but it would be unlikely to be significant.</p> <p>Ms Christensen added that at Mount Arthur, they need a 90% data capture. Monitors stop operating due to power surges, or other similar issues. Down-time is usually due to calibration and maintenance. Ms Christensen also added that having compliance conditions helps to drive the focus and upkeep, ensuring that the monitors are repaired and operational again as quickly as possible.</p> <p>Ms Lange asked Ms Christensen if the proposal would likely have a significant impact on reporting. Ms Christensen responding that it wouldn't.</p> <p>Ms Morton then discussed the Muswellbrook community drop-in event held on 24 October:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• EPA, DPIE Planning, DPIE EES and members of the UHAQAC attended.• morning tea was provided, along with the opportunity to tour the monitoring station, and talk about air quality issues.• materials were developed for the day (copies of which were provided to the members), including two EPA factsheets and the DPIE EES brochure on air quality.• approximately 50 residents attended, many of who were very passionate about the issues.• the next event will be held in Singleton early next year.• both of these events are part of the Upper Hunter Air Quality Communications Strategy that has been developed for, and presented to, the Committee.		
--	--	--	--	--

		<p>Dr Chicken, who attended the event, added that the factsheets have been well received by community. She said the community appreciated the opportunity to come and talk about their issues and concerns. She also added the “How to report to the EPA” is particularly helpful for people who want to call the EPA hotline.</p> <p>Mr Gilligan added that it is important to understand what the EPA can, or cannot do with reports. He had a journalist send through some information on a day that there was a significant dust storm. She sent through photos of dust in the area. There is nothing that the EPA would do with that information, it was dusty across the whole region. The EPA needs information about specific dust generation from sites, particularly where it relates to poor practices. Bureau of Meteorology satellite photos of regional dust were used to show the journalist where the dust had come from.</p> <p>Ms Morton added that the EPA has re-tweeted those photos to help improve community awareness.</p> <p>Mr Tate asked whether there were any conversations about woodsmoke at the event.</p> <p>Ms Morton said there were not, and this could have been because it was so hot and dry, that it was not at the top of people’s minds. She added that the EPA did have woodsmoke brochures and materials there if needed, but it was not the focus on the day.</p> <p>Mr Krey added that education is a top priority and it needs to be more than just drop-ins. He added that he has spoken to local doctors who said they have seen increases in upper respiratory problems in their patients in recent years. He also added that he attended a community meeting recently where this was discussed.</p> <p>Ms Christensen mentioned that at the Mining Dialogue Forum, health impacts and the lack of understanding of those impacts was a main point in group discussions. This feedback was provided to the organisers who will now consider what they can do in this space.</p> <p>Mr Tate added that broader education on what is happening is also extremely important.</p>		
2.5	General Business	<p>Ms Walsh thanked the Committee for having her at their meeting. She said that she really enjoyed the productive conversations and debates, and noted issues that the EPA and the Government could try to address. She acknowledged that it was a contentious space and trying to find a balance between industry, the environment and the community is always a challenge for the EPA.</p>	<p>Action 2: The EPA to provide an update of mine rehabilitation</p>	

		<p>She highlighted that the discussions around the new normal conditions with respect to the drought, fire impacts, and generally dry conditions was important. The EPA needs to consider how to drive good practice and compliance in these conditions.</p> <p>She added that her background is in safety and environmental regulation, and she is spending her time getting to know the issues the EPA faces.</p> <p>Mr Bedggood then raised his concerns that the Committee has been going for over eight years and is having the same discussions now as they did back then. He said that the legislation is the root of the problem, and that has not changed. He added that he often gets feedback that we are a “toothless tiger” that has not influenced change. He questioned how the Committee could change that.</p> <p>He added that the workshop was valuable, but how much of those actions have been pushed forward since then. He voiced frustration that while he had learnt a lot about air quality, the overall outcome had not changed.</p> <p>He added that the committee should be scrutinising the agricultural sector as well as the mining industry. He said that exposed land and stabilisation is a priority. He reminded the Committee of the presentation at a previous meeting on exposed lands and rehabilitation of mines. He was shocked at the poor performance of some mines. He requested an update on this (Action 2)</p> <p>Mr Bedggood also quoted Dr Dalton’s advice, that any particulate matter in the air will reduce life expectancy. He noted that while on holiday his asthma significantly improved. When he returned, he went back to coughing.</p> <p>Mr Gilligan responded to Mr Bedggood’s comments, highlighting that this is the last meeting of the current Committee, and the role of the Committee can be refreshed for the next tenure period. It is an opportunity to look at the terms of reference and how we can improve the scope. The Committee currently informs the EPA, not the whole of Government, but this could be a good time to re-visit this.</p> <p>He also recognised that exposed areas are a problem, and a focus area for the EPA. Information from the Bust the Dust campaign has helped inform this.</p> <p>A decrease in particulate levels will increase overall health, and this is the aim. He added it was important to control what we can.</p>	<p>progress in the Upper Hunter</p>	
--	--	---	-------------------------------------	--

		<p>Mr Sharrock added that he attended the Mining Dialogue Forum and encouraged all members to also attend the next event. He said that a lot of useful factual information was provided. This included a presentation on air quality and whether it is getting worse or not. The presentation showed that yes it was getting worse, but also across all regions including Sydney. He added that it is likely to be due to the increasing population and car emissions, as well as industry.</p> <p>He added that he understands that this is not a policy Committee, and that we have done our best, but getting the public more involved is important. He added that he had 25% coal in the dust tested on his outdoor furniture, and that has increased over time.</p> <p>He added that increased disturbed areas will increase coal dust in the area, and this problem does seem to be getting worse. He understood that rehabilitation is difficult in drought conditions, but asked what other things the Committee can do, or recommend.</p> <p>Ms Christensen added that each mine determines its contribution to the air shed and sends this data to DPIE Planning. This takes overburden into account.</p> <p>She also added that there is a condition in Mt Arthur's approval requiring it to work with other mines on dust control issues. The mines meet quarterly to discuss various issues, including as an example what dust suppressants they are using, and to compare air quality conditions. She added that each mine is trying to address cumulative impacts.</p> <p>She added that exposed areas during the drought has been a massive issue. Mt Arthur undertook 100 hectares of seeding but were having trouble getting it to grow under current dry conditions.</p> <p>She added that the Resources Regulator recently undertook a compliance blitz on rehabilitation at all mines.</p> <p>Mr Krey highlighted his concerns that anything above zero has a health impact, and that the EPA follows guidelines with values higher than this. He repeated concern with the EPA phrasing "air quality is generally good", which he had provided in relation to a recent media release.</p> <p>Ms Morton advised that his comments were taken on board, and that that the sentence was removed from the final version of the media release.</p>		
--	--	---	--	--

		<p>Mr Krey added that there is frustration that we can only make recommendations. The community is now looking to fight the battle, and the local doctors are now on board because they are concerned about the community's health. He said there was another community meeting next week.</p> <p>At the previous community meeting a statement was drafted that would be passed on to the relevant government agencies, including the EPA, once finalised.</p> <p>He also highlighted that because the air quality alerts are based on 24 hours averages, they are too late. These alerts need to come out when the air quality is bad, so people can take action. He added that having the alerts is good, but they need to be improved.</p> <p>Mr Gilligan acknowledged that this is an important issue that Government is looking into. He noted it is complex because the alerts are currently based on existing guidelines. A challenge is that there is no hourly guideline to compare against at this stage.</p> <p>Mr Krey added that people overall like the network, but it needs to be used.</p> <p>Mr Tate closed the meeting by thanking all the members for their valuable input. He added that the EPA staff had served this Committee well. He added that what we can achieve as a Committee is set by a lot of parameters, but the input of the members has been invaluable.</p> <p>He expressed appreciation for all the strong discussions, and that everyone had always walked away understanding each other's views.</p> <p>He added that a new brief could be a new opportunity and that is a good thing for the Committee.</p> <p>He highlighted that the drone use by the EPA and education came out of the recommendations by the Committee.</p> <p>He noted that there had been no inroads on diesel emissions, wood smoke or power generation yet.</p> <p>He thanked the Committee and wished the members a Merry Christmas.</p> <p>He closed the meeting at 12:00pm.</p>		
--	--	---	--	--