



Minutes

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| Meeting: | Upper Hunter Air Quality Advisory Committee (No 35) | Date: | Thursday 19 November 2020 |
| Location: | Singleton Youth Venue | Time: | 10am-1pm |
| Last Meeting Date: | Thursday 21 November 2019 | Next Meeting Date: | Tuesday 23 February 2021 |
| Present: | John Turner – Chairperson Tracy Ward – Muswellbrook Shire Council representative Danny Thompson – Singleton Shire Council representative John Krey – community representative Michael White – community representative Bob Vickers – community representative Wendy Wales – environmental representative (online) Catherine Chicken – industry representative Ned Stephenson – coal industry representative Gary Mulhern – coal industry representative Summer Steward – power industry representative Adam Gilligan – EPA Gina Bradley – EPA Karen Gallagher – EPA Loredana Warren – DPIE | | |
| Apologies: | Maurice Collison – Upper Hunter Shire Council representative Kim Patrick – EPA | | |

Agenda items:

1. Introduction

1.1. Welcome, Acknowledgment of Country and COVID-19 Procedures

The chair acknowledged the Wanaruah people as the traditional owners of the land. Ms Bradley ran through COVID-19 procedures and housekeeping.

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.

1.3. Committee introductions

Each member introduced themselves to the group, giving a brief background and summary of their interests in joining the Committee.

2. Previous Minutes and Outstanding Actions

2.1. Review previous minutes

The previous minutes were adopted by the former members present at this meeting.

2.2. Outstanding actions

| Action Item No | Action | Person Responsible | Status |
|----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | The EPA to provide an update of mine rehabilitation progress in the Upper Hunter | Adam Gilligan | Ongoing – to be revisited following discussion at previous meetings, Mr Gilligan agreed to organise an update from NSW Resources Regulator |

3. Strategic Plan 2020-2022

3.1. Looking back: a review of the last year and summary of Committee achievements

Mr Gilligan provided a brief history of the Committee's establishment in 2010. The purpose of the Committee was initially to oversee the implementation and operation of the Upper Hunter Air Quality Monitoring Network (UHAQMN), but the scope was expanded in 2015 to include the provision of advice on air quality management and monitoring. The Committee has been advising on the network and air quality issues ever since.

The outcomes and recommendations from the UHAQAC Planning Forum in May 2019 were presented to the Committee. The presentation is available on the EPA [website](#). It was acknowledged that there are some significant challenges in this space and the Committee has achieved great results through a range of recommendations to improve air quality in the region. Examples of this include taking a role to advocate for change and having input into the planning process.

The Committee has a great networking value by involving people from different parts of the debate in the same room. Mr Gilligan has seen strong relationships built as a result of shared conversation about peoples' health and the environment.

Mr Gilligan also outlined the EPA's role with the Committee and the importance of seeking consensus.

3.2. Looking forward: goal setting for the future term

No additional agenda items were raised by the Committee prior to the meeting. The Chair asked each member to raise any matters for the Committee to consider for the new term. The following themes were discussed:

Outstanding actions from the former Committee:

- It was acknowledged that some of the items in the presentation from the UHAQAC Planning Forum were listed as ongoing or to be complete. This is largely due to the time gap since the former Committee's term had expired and some of the items are now out of date. It was agreed that the Committee would benefit from further commentary to bring the presentation up to date.
- It was also agreed that there has already been a lot of work done and that the new Committee should take the recommendations from the previous Committee and move forward.
- The 5-Year Review of the UHAQMN, which is available on the DPIE [website](#), outlines four objectives in the review findings at p24-25. Mr Krey highlighted that one of these is "to facilitate the development and implementation of strategies to improve air quality in those areas". He would like to see the new Committee continue to concentrate on this area and follow up actions that have been put forward by the former Committee. The Committee was reminded that other items could also be added to the list. The quality, value and accessibility of information will not be reduced. Work is currently being undertaken to improve mobile phone accessibility and change the reporting average to increase the amount of time for the community to respond and take action.

Renewal of the Upper Hunter Particle Characterisation Study:

- Some Committee members agreed it would be worthwhile to revisit the Particle Characterisation Study. It was considered that the 2016 study is outdated.
- Many of the issues for Singleton and Camberwell are around PM10 and PM2.5. Diesel emission standards are currently below world standards. Cr Thompson suggested that the committee should be advocating for National Environment Protection Measure (NEPM) standards.

- Studies are a great tool and the former Lower Hunter Particle Characterisation Study contains more comprehensive information. This has allowed us to discover things that have previously been presumed. For example, the study found that higher PM10 levels at Stockton were due to a spike in ammonium nitrate, not sea salt. This resulted in a targeted regulatory effort which required Orica to upgrade its Prill tower and reduce emissions by 40%.
- Mr Gilligan agreed to consider the possibility of updating the Upper Hunter Particle Characterisation Study, acknowledging that cost will be a factor. Matt Riley, Director Climate & Atmospheric of Science Economic Insights DPIE, could be invited to attend a meeting to test these views.
- Mr Krey mentioned the dust studies that were completed through the University of Queensland and asked whether it would be of benefit to make these more widely available. The studies looked at samples of depositional dust from eight different properties and the results showed the composition of dust around Bulga Coal Mine.

Woods smoke:

- Consideration was given to woodsmoke as another contributor to local air quality. Educating the community on local sources, as opposed to commercial and industrial sources, would be worthwhile to reduce neighbours burning in the winter.
- It was agreed that this is an area that the Committee has capacity to influence.
- It was acknowledged that that this is not just an issue in winter and the study ran over the whole year.

Existing data:

- It was acknowledged that the data from the monitoring network is great and other countries do not all have this quality of data. The data is useful for reducing health risks by enabling the community to set limits, for example with outdoor sport activities.
- Accessibility and analysis of the monitoring network data is also useful for providing a broader context. It is valuable to use the data to influence the improvement of air quality.

Existing scope of the Committee:

- It was acknowledged that the goals set out in the existing Terms of Reference are valuable.
- Ms Chicken raised the importance of having the ability to advise on improving air quality included in the Terms of Reference. The Committee should look at what our actions and preferences are going to be for the next terms and what we can proactively do to improve air quality.

| Action Item No | Action | Person Responsible |
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| 2 | Update the presentation from the UHAQAC Planning Forum outcome and recommendations and revisit the actions from the previous work of the Committee | Adam Gilligan |
| 3 | Consider possibility to update the Upper Hunter Particle Characterisation Study | Adam Gilligan |

4. Network feedback – standing item

4.1. Information sharing and feedback from broader networks

This agenda item is an opportunity for the Committee to hear from community and industry representatives on any particular issues from their broader networks. Community representatives have previously waited for quarterly meetings to share complaints about the mines, but these issues should be raised directly with the mine and the EPA at the time the issues occur. Where there is a more systemic problem, the issue can be brought to the Committee.

Ms Chicken shared feedback that there is often a lack of understanding of air quality issues in the local community. We have an educational role to show what pathways exist and simple processes that should be followed. The Muswellbrook drop-in session and community fact sheets were very valuable. Cr Thompson noted that the factsheets would be useful to include in councils’ rates notices. This ties in with the education and engagement recommendations from the UHAQAC Planning Forum. In order to focus

on getting the right information to the right people, it is necessary to consider what the message is, who the audience is and what the appropriate channel of communication is. It continues to be a key challenge for the Committee to communicate the message that action should be taken when air quality is poor due to bushfires and drought. The data that is made available to the community has helped with this.

Ms Wales suggested utilising the Science Teachers Association or staff development days, to work with teachers in communicating these messages with children in schools. It was agreed that this was a good suggestion to take onboard.

| Action Item No | Action | Person Responsible |
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| 4 | Circulate factsheets from the Muswellbrook drop-in session | Gina Bradley |
| 5 | Consider options for liaising with the Science Teachers Association | Gina Bradley |

5. EPA Update – standing item

5.1. Regulatory Operations Metropolitan North

Mr Gilligan provided an update on the NSW Upper House inquiry into the management of coal ash at coal fired power stations. The NSW Upper House Committee has met three times, hearing from community groups and regulators as well as completing site inspections at Lake Macquarie power stations. Air quality and groundwater remain areas of concern to the community. The EPA has appeared before the Committee, which is currently preparing a report. A key issue has been considering the onus of the remediation of the sites post closure, as the sites were originally purchased from State Government. It has also been an opportunity to raise air and groundwater issues more broadly.

Dr Vickers asked questions around the international standards of emissions, some of which are significantly tighter than the limits set for power stations in the Hunter Valley. The EPA has recently reviewed the licenses across all five NSW power stations for consistency. Consideration should be given to the short lifespans of Liddell and Vales Point power stations when investing in technology to improve standards. A different calculation would apply to Bayswater power station with 25 years remaining in its lifespan. Doctors for the Environment Australia have done good work around load-based licensing to determine if health costs are adequately being reflected.

It can be difficult to assess the origin of the pollution components. Mr White asked about rail contributions and highlighted a previous study that looked at this. The Particle Characterisation Study indicated that rail contributions had a low-level impact. Previous Committee members attended a presentation in Sydney several years ago on rail movements, which looked at diesel retrofits to reduce emissions. The EPA has also done studies around locomotives and coal terminals which are of value to target sources. Different approaches have been taken to put scrutiny on mines to encourage them to perform better. The EPA's use of drones for the Bust the Dust campaign is an example of this.

There was some further conversation around best practice to manage exposed areas, effective ways to support rehabilitation and crossover with other regulators. The Chair closed the discussion to move on to the next agenda item.

5.2. Bust the Dust

Ms Gallagher presented an update on Operation Bust the Dust, outlining the key objectives, concept, findings and challenges. It is great to see that most mines are doing the right thing.

The end date for this year's campaign is still being evaluated. Given the forecast for the summer ahead, it is possible the campaign may continue in response to particularly bad weather days.

When the campaign first ran in 2019, the EPA tweeted on days that Bust the Dust was operating. The value of this was to notify mines that expectations would be higher on these days, similarly to how highway patrol will notify the public when double demerits are in place. Twitter is still being used for the campaign this year, but the advance notifications have not been sent.

Mr Krey noted that there have been approximately 290 alarms this year, indicating to the community that the problem has not been fixed. Mr Gilligan pointed out that Bust the Dust is a campaign that specifically targets mine practices. It is one part of the solution.

There was some discussion about how fines are set and a suggestion that whilst the maximum fine is \$1 million, the likelihood is closer to \$15,000. It was noted that industry do take any concerns from EPA leading to penalty notices or prosecutions very seriously, because it affects their reputation and broader consequences such as repercussions with shareholders. There are more layers than simply just the infringement.

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| 6 | Circulate presentation with videos from Operation Bust the Dust | Gina Bradley |

6. Air Quality Monitoring Network Seasonal Newsletter – standing item

6.1. Overview of Air Quality Monitoring Network Newsletters 11.45am-12pm

Ms Warren presented an overview of the Air Quality Monitoring Network including the following:

- The quantity, type (standard/rural/indicative) and location of the monitoring stations
- The available data, including hourly updates and historical data
- Seasonal and annual newsletters and the review process
- The 5-Year Review and Fine Particle Characterisation Study
- Driving factors of air pollution including sources, seasonal influences and particle trends
- Recent and upcoming projects:-
 - National Air Technical Advisory Group (NATAG)
 - Improved air quality alerts – SMS and email alerts to subscribers based on hourly particle levels
 - Enhanced website and air quality data delivery (EWADD) program
 - Enhancing air quality forecasting in NSW program
 - NSW and ACT Regional Climate Modelling (NARClIM) Project

Dr Vickers asked about the location of the monitoring stations. This was looked at when the network was first established with the committee playing a key role. It was also looked at as part of the 5-Year Review.

Hard copies of a brochure on Upper Hunter Air Quality were provided to the Committee. Copies are also available [online](#).

6.2. Autumn 2020 Newsletter

Ms Warren reported on the findings in the autumn 2020 newsletter:

- No days over the NO₂, SO₂ and PM_{2.5} benchmarks
- Five days over the PM₁₀ benchmark – less than autumn 2018 and 2019
- Increased PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5} rolling annual averages – air quality was affected by extensive bushfires across eastern NSW and intense drought and increased dust storms in spring-summer 2019-20 prior to February coastal rain
- Rainfall in autumn 2020 was average to above average – similar to autumn 2019
- Maximum temperatures were below average and minimum temperatures were average
- Winds were variable (typical for autumn) transitioning from south-easterly to north-westerly
- Current drought conditions and outlook – summer likely to be wetter than average with warmer than average nights

7. General Business

7.1. Other

It was questioned why NSW Health was not present at the meeting. Following the end of term of the former Committee in November 2019, approval was sought to expand the scope of the Committee to enable it to advise other State Government agencies and the Minister more broadly, in addition to advising the EPA. Because of this, the NSW Health and DPIE Planning representatives are no longer

formal members of the Committee. However, they can still be invited to attend future meetings. The updated Terms of Reference set out the extended scope of the Committee.

Ms Bradley referred the Committee to the draft committee procedures which include a template to submit requests for technical expertise. The procedures will be formally adopted if no further comments are received before the next meeting.

Photos were taken for the EPA website and members were reminded to send through a 100-150 word introduction if they have not already, to complete the member profiles.

7.2. Next meeting date

The next meeting date has been scheduled for Tuesday 23 February 2021.

| Action Item No | Action | Person Responsible |
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| 7 | Confirm if NSW Health and DPIE Planning can continue to be invited to all future meetings as non-members of the Committee | Ms Bradley |
| 8 | Send any comments of the draft committee procedures to Ms Bradley | All |