



Minutes

Meeting:	Newcastle Community Consultative Committee on the Environment (No 61)	Date:	Monday 15 November 2021
Location:	Online	Time:	5.30pm – 7:30pm
Last Meeting	Monday 16 August 2021		Monday 21 February 2021
Present:	John Tate – Chairperson Keith Craig – Community representative Rick Banyard – Community representative Nathan Robinson – Industry representative Leah Cook – Industry representative Glen Cook – Deputy representative Peter McMurray – Council representative Steven Crick – Environmental representative Sean Watt – DPIE Stephen White – DPIE Mike Bardsley – HCCDC Peter Jamieson – EPA Anthony Van Der Horst – EPA Gina Bradley – EPA David Gathercole – EPA		
Apologies:	Trudie Larnach – Industry representative Christopher Tola – Community representative		

Agenda items:

1. Introduction

1.1. Acknowledgment of Country

The Chair acknowledged the Awabakal and Worimi people as the traditional owners of the land and paid respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

1.2. Housekeeping for online meeting

Ms Bradley outlined procedures for participating in the meeting online.

1.3. Present and apologies

The Chair welcomed the committee and noted the apologies. There were no declarations of interest.

2. Previous Minutes and Outstanding Actions

2.1. Review previous minutes

The minutes from the previous quarterly meeting were adopted with no changes.

No.	Outstanding action	Status	Lead
2.2	Meeting 57, Action 1: EPA to organise a presentation from HCCDC in relation to long term remediation on Kooragang Island	See item 6 below	Adam Gilligan
2.3	Meeting No. 59, Action 1: Mr Gilligan to provide details of the Upper House inquiry into ash dams	Complete	Adam Gilligan
2.4	Meeting No. 59, Action 2: Ms Whelan to provide an update on water quality at the next meeting	See item 4 below	Megan Whelan
2.5	Meeting No. 59, Action 3: The committee members to come prepared with topics for potential discussion at next meeting	See item 9 below	Committee members

3. Industry update

3.1. Orica

Mr Robinson gave an update on the preliminary understanding of the fire incident that took place at Orica over the weekend.

- There was a fire on the exterior of the 'stripper' at approximately 9pm on Saturday. The 'stripper' is a carbon dioxide removal vessel in the ammonia plant. The fire caused some damage to the cladding on the vessel.
- Operators shut down the Ammonia plant in accordance with the emergency plan. The emergency plan was implemented effectively. The firewater was contained onsite through bunding and /or isolation valves.
- FRNSW were onsite by approximately 9.30pm and the fire was extinguished by approximately 11pm.
- Orica have notified the incident in accordance with their PIRMP. All of the firewater has been pumped out of the catchment system. The residual will be retested before making a decision about reopening the isolation valve.
- The ammonia plant will be down for some time. An upcoming maintenance shut is likely to be brought forward, to use this time to complete planned maintenance.
- There has been low demand of ammonia due to wet weather, but if necessary, during this period it will be shipped in.
- Cleanaway's treatment facility is unable to take the fire water at the moment due to the Weston fire, so Orica are storing the water onsite in existing tanks It will be tested before being transferred to a local treatment facility.
- The nitric acid and ammonium nitrate plants were not in the vicinity of the fire therefore there was no risk to those plants. The ammonium nitrate plant has been running today.

There is an active investigation so limited information can be shared at this stage, but Mr Robinson agreed to give a further update at the next meeting.

Action Item No	Action	Person Responsible
1	Any further information to be shared with the committee in relation to the fire incident on 13 November 2021	Nathan Robinson

3.2. Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC)

Ms Cook gave a quick update on the interruption to transport of coal, due to climate change protest activities that have occurred in the last few weeks. ARTC have removed the 14th protestor today with the support of police. This activity is not condoned as protestors are putting themselves and ARTC at risk. The committee agreed that whilst they can understand the reasoning and appreciate the right to protest, it is not safe and is putting lives at risk.

4. EPA Update

4.1. Regulatory Operations Metropolitan North

Mr Gilligan is currently away on secondment and Ms Whelan is on maternity leave. Mr Gathercole was introduced as the A/Director Metro North. Mr Jamieson gave the following operational updates:

Pollution levels in Hunter River

- The Hunter River pollutant load project has been undertaken this year, building on findings of the Lower Hunter river health monitoring programs.
- Pollution reduction programs aim to drive down nutrients and metals, the two categories that were identified in the earlier study.
- The Hunter River pollutant load project is about re-evaluating and assessing priorities. It looked at licence monitoring data, pollution reports, NPI data, and ranked industry for various nutrients and various metals.
- Findings show that Bartter has a bigger source of nutrients than Orica, so there has been a shift in focus.
- Tomago Aluminium had the highest load of metals, so engagement is taking place with them to reduce current levels from their biproducts and stockpiles.
- Other projects will also have an impact, such as the Orica prill tower works. This will not only improve air quality but also river quality.
- The Chair acknowledged that this is good work and should be further promoted.
- Mr Craig asked about PFAS levels in the Hunter River. PFAS is not part of the scope of this project. PFAS is managed as part of a bigger state-wide program, the NSW PFAS investigation program. This identifies sites, such as petroleum facilities, chemical storage facilities and power stations, to address the sources of PFAS and create plans to remove, contain and control PFAS on these sites. Over 900 sites have been investigated across NSW. Testing in relation to safe fishing in the river is done through the NSW Department of Primary Industries (Fisheries).

Koppers incidents

- Two incidents occurred on 25 and 26 October 2021. This occurred whilst Koppers were loading pitch into their vessel. A number of reports were received from the public. Various factors led to these incidents and the circumstances are currently being investigated.

4.2. EPA Roadshows

Ms Bradley gave an overview of the roadshows, including the following:

- The roadshows are about listening and learning and trying to improve what we do. The EPA is on a journey to becoming a World Class Regulator and having effective and genuine relationships with all of our stakeholders is central to this.
- The first round of roadshows was held in February and March 2021, with industry and councils in separate session.
- Community roadshow will take place on Friday 19 November – great to see all community representatives are already registered. Broader networks are also encouraged to attend. There will be lots of relevant discussion including a focus on air quality and how to report pollution.
- The roadshows are a great opportunity to get involved, have your say and hold discussions with the CEO and Executive team.
- There will be more opportunities for councils and licensees in the new year. We will be sharing key outcomes and continuing the conversation.
- The roadshows will be held on an ongoing basis as part of our new engagement approach, with forums taking place each year.

Action Item No	Action	Person Responsible
2	Ms Bradley to circulate a promotional roadshow poster, for the committee to share with broader community networks	All

5. Communications update

5.1. Story ideas and communication platforms

Ms Bradley presented on the EPA's existing communication platforms and how each of these can be used:

- The Roadshows is a new tool for us to engage with the broader community directly and there will be opportunities to attend forums like the upcoming on Friday more regularly.
- The committee webpage is currently where the meeting minutes, presentations, studies and member profiles are currently kept. There is some potential here to improve the way this webpage is presented, including adding stories to highlight areas of focus for the committee.
- EPA Connect is a state-wide newsletter, with 6,000 subscribers. It provides all EPA stakeholders and the general community with easily accessible information about the EPA, its work and latest initiatives. There are a few places in the newsletter where the committee could contribute towards a story; the 'Around the regions' section and the 'Regulation in action' section. In the latest issues we featured a longer case study on air quality which included reference to the monitoring networks, the new DPIE website and also mentioned the committees. All of the committee are encouraged to subscribe to the newsletter if they have not already.
- 'Stay up to date' on the EPA homepage, is another option for getting story updates on issues being managed by the EPA, out to the broader community.
- Social media platforms currently include Facebook (2,300 followers), Twitter (4,830 followers) and LinkedIn (11,793 followers).
- Media releases are often issued for PINs, promotion of regulatory work, major announcements, grant opportunities and community events.
- 'Have your say' is the EPA's online engagement platform that allows people to have their say on environmental initiatives. All online consultations are run through this platform. It has lots of useful functionality for engaging with the community.
- External community newsletters also exist, including the City of Newcastle's quarterly newsletter and weekly podcast and Orica's quarterly newsletter.

The committee was previously requested to provide a list of story ideas. Ideas sent through by Mr Craig have been promoted through the various platforms above. Ms Bradley invited other members of the committee to continue sharing story ideas for potential use on these platforms. Story ideas could include news updates, best practice and case studies. These can be sent to the NCCCE mailbox for consideration.

Mr Craig will consider arranging for an EPA representative to attend a future SCG meeting in the new year.

The Chair asked if stories such as noise issues coming from reversing forklifts, the presence of sea salt in the Hunter Valley, burning timber in household fireplaces and the transition to electric cars would be appropriate. Ms Bradley advised that it is important to keep the stories relevant to the work of the EPA if we want them to be promoted through EPA communication platforms. Each story will need to be considered individually to determine if the content is appropriate.

Mr Craig asked if Orica's recent announcement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions could be promoted. Mr Robinson offered to provide more information in relation to tertiary abatement and is happy to present on this.

Action Item No	Action	Person Responsible
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3	Ms Bradley to add a standing agenda item for story ideas at future meetings and will coordinate a process to collate any ideas for consideration	Gina Bradley
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6. Remediation on Kooragang Island

6.1. Presentation from Hunter and Central Coast Development Corporation (HCCDC)

Mr Bardsley introduced himself as the Environment Manager for HCCDC and thanked the committee for the opportunity to contribute. He presented on the following:

- HCCDC's responsibility in the remediation of BHP's former steelworks site and the environmental improvements and capping works at the Kooragang Island landfill site.
- The history of the copper smelter and then BHP Steelworks, both of which generated a huge amount of waste during a period of time when there were no waste regulations and no specific landfill.
- Maps were presented to the committee showing the status and key features of the capping works across KIWEF, including integration with other capping.
- An overview was given on the work being done to preserve ecology and manage risks, including the wetlands constructed to create habitat for the endangered green and golden bell frog.
- The \$750m remediation project on the state's leased portion of KIWEF to the Port of Newcastle, which will occur next year.
- Roughly 25% of BHP's industrial era landfill has now been capped. The remainder of the waste legacy is being managed by other parties.

Mr Crick asked if a site tour could be organised. Mr Bardsley would appreciate the opportunity to continue with his presentation in some more detail and could make arrangements for a site tour if the committee is interested. Mr Gathercole agreed to consider any options for this offline, including the logistics.

Action Item No	Action	Person Responsible
4	EPA to work with HCCDC on any options for a site visit	Mike Bardsley Anthony Van Der Horst David Gathercole

7. Air Quality Monitoring Network

7.1. Winter 2021 Newsletter

Mr Watt presented on the winter 2021 seasonal newsletter, including the following key points:

- Air quality in Newcastle region was predominantly good in winter 2021
- The annual average PM10 and PM2.5 were the lowest since the beginning of the network, the previous annual average was the highest, due to extensive bushfire activity.
- There were 2 days over the PM10 daily benchmark, 2 June and 9 August 2021, both occurring at Stockton. Stockton PM10 levels were most likely affected by sea salt on 2 June and 9 August, due to its proximity to the coast.
- Levels of PM2.5, NO₂, SO₂ and NH₃ remained below the benchmarks and assessment criteria throughout the season.
- This is the first season where SO₂ and NO₂ were assessed against the new standard.
- The Newcastle region experienced below average rainfall overall during winter 2021 compared to long-term records. Winds were predominately from the north-west region.
- The target network performance is at least 95% available data for all parameters.

Mr Craig raised the issue of strong NW winds causing black dust in Stockton. He noticed that the Stockton monitor was above 50 ug/m³ for PM 10 levels, whereas other stations were around 20 ug/m³.

There is a concern that the black dust is coming from Kooragang Island. Mr Jamieson has confirmed to Mr Craig that operators are encouraged to take a proactive approach and take action to control dust prior to the onset of NW winds.

Mr Craig asked Mr Cook if Port Waratah operations were recovering coal over the weekend during strong winds. Mr Cook offered to share all of their production data offline with Mr Craig if necessary.

Mr White notified the committee that the 4-year review of the Lower Hunter Monitoring Network is due next September 2022. The approach will be very similar to the last review. It will involve evaluating whether the network is fit for purpose, cost effective and whether any changes are needed. The committee will be invited to provide feedback at a future meeting.

Action Item No	Action	Person Responsible
5	Overview on the 4-year review presentation to be circulated to the committee.	Stephen White

7.2. Live demonstration of the upgraded DPIE website

Mr White gave a live demonstration of the upgraded [DPIE website](#). There is also a specific page for the [Lower Hunter](#). The changes were informed by the issues during the bushfires to make the site more mobile friendly and accessible. Committee representatives were thanked for their contributions towards initial scoping. The health advice is now front and centre, with the landing page listing all regions. Mr White demonstrated how to search for a monitoring station on the map, how to read the data on the tables and how to view the graphs. The committee were directed to the online feedback form for any feedback on the website. The feedback form can be used on both mobile and desktop.

There were no specific comments from the committee, other than that the changes looked very good.

8. Bite of Science Presentation

8.1. Reduction in observed SO2 in Newcastle in 2020

This will be carried over to the next meeting.

9. General Business

9.1. Other

A few members were interested in the media coverage today on Sydney shipping 12,000 cubic metres of toxic waste into Newcastle. It was acknowledged that there is currently a lot of conflicting information on this and the story will likely unfold over the next few days. Mr McMurray offered to investigate this further on behalf of the committee, given that it is allegedly coming to Summerhill.

Mr Banyard requested an agenda item at the next meeting on the EPA's reporting process. He has previously raised this as an issue. It is important that there is an effective and fit for purpose mechanism in place for reporting to the EPA. Mr Banyard was recently provided with an update on the EPA's current work around this. It was agreed that this would be considered further and can also be raised separately at the upcoming roadshow forum.

9.2. Next Meeting Date

The next meeting date was confirmed as 21 February 2021 at 5.30pm. The committee would prefer to hold future meetings in person if possible.

Action Item No	Action	Person Responsible
6	Investigate any further information in relation to the toxic waste being shipped from Sydney to Newcastle	Peter McMurray
7	Organise an EPA technical expert to attend the next meeting to discuss the EPA's reporting process	Gina Bradley

