“Everyone who is born, lives, plays, learns, works, travels, makes their home, does business, or grows old in NSW deserves to breathe clean air.”

This is the opening sentence of the Minister’s forward to the Clean Air for NSW Consultation Paper.

I can only imagine the dismay of a parent of a child living in Broken Hill on reading in the Consultation paper that the National Standard for lead is met throughout NSW. (p15)

While this statement may be technically correct, if based on lead-in-air measurements according to the National Standard’s protocols, it does not provide a full account of the state-of-knowledge, given that

“...there has been an unacceptable rise in the rate of children with high blood lead levels,” (in Broken Hill) (1).

and

“Data from the NSW Health Blood Lead Program in 2012 shows that approximately 21 per cent of all children aged 1 to 4 years, and 37 per cent of Aboriginal children aged one to four who were tested had elevated blood lead levels in Broken Hill above the goal.(1)

Lead in the blood of children living in Broken Hill is clearly a very significant problem of longstanding resulting from air pollution, and the associated health outcomes have the potential to severely diminish the chances of a large number of young children from reaching their potential in life.

The Government has recognised the problem, announcing work in 2015 with the aim of reducing lead levels in Broken Hill, so it is baffling why the problem is not recognised in the Consultation Paper – and a goal adopted that no child in NSW will be exposed to unacceptably high concentrations of lead in air.

Given the Paper’s statement that The evidence tells us that the greatest public health gains will come from reducing long-term exposure of large populations to air pollution (p8, 10), it is to be hoped that the omission of acknowledgment of the Broken Hill lead problem (and the measures to address it) from the Consultation Paper, is not due to the fact that Broken Hill is not a large population.

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