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Submission on Consultation Paper Clean Air for NSW

We are a community group that has been devoted to the advocacy of clean unpolluted air for the past 30 years. We have worked diligently with the EPA and Heavy Industry to improve the air quality in this heavy industrial area. We have studied the Consultation Paper about Clean Air for NSW with much pleasure and satisfaction that at last the impacts of polluted air on the health and well-being of citizens is finally being taken seriously by governments.

We will address our comments to the five main headings indicated in the consultation paper on page 5-Industry, Transport, Households, Managing Impacts and Promote air “Co-benefits”

Industry

- **Improved Management**
  The Load-based licensing scheme can be improved by increasing fees for dangerous pollutants including arsenic, cadmium, mercury and especially 2.5 particulates. Small particulates, less than 2.5 are especially dangerous because they can be taken deeper into the lungs.

- **Minimise Emissions**
  Minimise emissions from coal fired power stations by capturing CO2 or increasing wind, solar, water, thermal or tidal electricity production.

- Stricter conditions on the rehabilitation of industry and mining sites. There should be a bond system placed on developments.

- We agree that there should be stricter controls on the dust capture from coal mining and transport activities.

- Forbid approval for processes that are not “World’s Best Practice”. Allowing companies to regularly work open-air facilities including stockpiles is very poor practice. Stockpiles should be adequately managed to prevent dust pollution. They should be fully enclosed in pressurized buildings to prevent dust emissions from escaping into the surrounding environments.
• Minimise and reduce self-regulation. Residents do not trust self-reporting because of previous events. The EPA should ensure that monitoring is true and correctly done by spot inspections.

**Transport, Engines and Fuels**

• We agree that electric vehicles should be encouraged including cars, trams and trains. We should be planning electricity refueling stations where they will be needed, with adequate supplies of power. Transport and fuel requirements will be very different from the requirements of today. We need to plan for the future. Encourage governments to help by giving tax incentives for electric vehicles.
• Cycle ways throughout cities and towns should also become a planning priority.
• We agree that vehicle emissions standards for NSW government contracts should be investigated.
• Diesel emissions from machines and locomotives should be reduced by spot checks from time to time.

**Households**

• We agree that wood smoke emissions should be reduced, there are some areas where wood smoke is a real problem and we need to review these problem areas. Encourage heating by electric appliances.
• Small petrol engines need special attention also to reduce their emissions. It is a difficult problem that also needs further research.

**Managing Exposure and Impacts**

This is the most important part of this Consultation Paper. The health and well-being of the community and the protection of the environment for future generations is the most urgent part of this work. We must quantify the problems to understand how we can best address them. Monitoring air pollution is vital but added to that it would be sensible to monitor the beneficial qualities in the air we breathe. When ozone levels are high does that mean that oxygen levels are low because there has been a chemical change from oxygen to ozone?
• Oxygen levels should be monitored as well as ozone. It will be beneficial to find out if there is oxygen reduction at ground level when lightning flashes turn oxygen into ozone.
• Ozone is a poison to humans and we need to know when and if oxygen is depleted in the air we breathe. Normally oxygen is about 20.8% of the air at sea level. Warnings could be given to those whose breathing capacity is compromised. The deaths of 8 people and the hospitalization of 8000 residents in Melbourne during the severe thunderstorms last year
emphasizes the point that we are not fully prepared to predict the impacts associated with storms that seem to be happening more frequently.

There needs to be a review of the monitoring network to improve our knowledge of air quality experienced in NSW regions.

- We agree that forecasting advice must be improved to inform air quality responses to help people manage their exposure.
- We agree that there should be improved responses to air quality incidents. The Illawarra needs more specific monitoring sites to study the accumulated pollution, the site specific pollution and the pollution blown in from outside the area-three monitors are inadequate for this whole industrial area. The complete picture needs to be studied so that we can accurately predict what is likely to happen.
- The public needs education about how and what to report to authorities. Now public reports are vague and do not contain specific detail of how to report, who to ring, time, date, place, wind direction etc. People often tell us about their complaints but the information is very vague and difficult to pass on to the EPA. There needs to be an advertising campaign.
- Governments need to do health studies in various regions to gauge the overall impacts of pollution, especially focusing on cancer clusters, respiratory disease and blood disorders.

**Promote Air “Co-benefits”**

- We agree with the promotion of energy efficiency and advanced energy and climate change adaption actions. Whether or not human action can slow or halt climate change, we must make plans to adapt to the climate change predictions for the welfare of our nation.
- Air quality travels. The winds carry air pollution from place to place. What is produced in industrial areas is carried up and down the coast and all around the country. We often witness the heavy smog from traffic in Sydney moving along the horizon out at sea. It is likely that some of that smog originates from the open cut coal mines in the Hunter, passes through Sydney and travels down the coast to the Illawarra. The North Easterly breezes then blow the smog from Sydney inland to Albion Park where it settles in the low lying land. If we clean up the pollution from the Hunter and the traffic smog from Sydney, the Illawarra will benefit. Likewise clean up the industrial pollution in the Illawarra and Sydney will benefit.

Yours sincerely,
Olive Rodwell
For and on behalf of the Port Kembla Pollution Meeting