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Dr I Holland
Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs
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Dear Dr Holland

Thank you for forwarding the submission from the Hunter Community Environment Centre (HCEC) to the Senate Committee Inquiry into the Impacts of Air Quality on Health in Australia. The NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) appreciates the opportunity to provide a written response to matters raised by the HCEC that relate to the EPA.

The main issues raised in the HCEC submission relating to the EPA are:

1. The EPA's summary of 2012 Upper Hunter air quality monitoring data and its monitoring, reporting and communication of air quality data generally.

2. The EPA's statement on the report by the Australian Rail Track Corporation on monitoring of dust emissions from trains in the Hunter.

3. The EPA's role in approval and regulation of coal mines and extensions to coal mines.

EPA responses to the matters raised are provided below. I have also attached a copy of the EPA's recently released *Upper Hunter Air Particles Action Plan* which presents further information relevant to the issues raised by the HCEC and to the Inquiry's Terms of Reference.

1. EPA presentation of 2012 Upper Hunter air quality monitoring data and EPA monitoring, reporting and communication of air quality data broadly

The EPA has provided an accurate summary of air quality data recorded by the Upper Hunter Air Quality Monitoring Network (UHAQMN) during 2012 and confirms the statements in the summary, including that PM_{10} levels exceeded national standards on seven days during the reporting period. The summary is available at: http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/aqms/20130037HunterAir2012.pdf.

National ambient standards are set by the National Environment Protection (Ambient Air Quality) Measure (Air NEPM). The NEPM also prescribes the characteristics and operations of air monitoring stations.

Importantly, the Air NEPM states that in order to measure achievement against the Air NEPM standards and goals, the air quality monitoring station(s) *"must be located in a manner such that they contribute to obtaining a representative measure of the air quality likely to be experienced by the general population in the region or sub-region"*. It is critical to note the regional and sub-regional, rather than local, context.

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It is for this reason that only those sites in the UHAQMN designated as large population centre monitors, namely Singleton and Muswellbrook, should be compared to the Air NEPM standards, as it is these stations that are specifically located to record air quality likely to be experienced by the general population in the region. The summary of the monitoring data accurately reflects this position.

Understanding how the data from the network is collected and collated is necessary in order to understand how the data relate to the NEPM standards. The EPA and Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) are investigating the way data is currently communicated to the public and how this can be improved to assist the community in interpreting the data.

2. EPA statement on report by the Australian Rail Track Corporation

To investigate levels of dust generated by coal train movements and improve understanding of the issue, the EPA issued the Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC) with a legally binding pollution reduction program (PRP) in September 2011. This required the ARTC to install two dust monitoring stations along the Hunter Valley rail corridor for the pilot monitoring of dust generated by different train movements.

In accordance with the PRP, ARTC published the report of the investigation on its website in September 2012. The ARTC report indicated, and the EPA has advised publicly, that the ARTC findings showed no appreciable difference between the dust levels measured during the movement of loaded or unloaded coal trains and other types of freight trains.

The EPA required ARTC on 9 October 2012, by way of a second legally binding PRP, to undertake further air monitoring to confirm the pilot monitoring results and report these results back to the EPA and public. This second round of monitoring was targeted towards warm, dry conditions most likely to generate dust. The EPA has commenced a review of the draft monitoring report and expects that the final report will be made available to the public during May 2013.

Early indications from the draft report are that, while the overall dust levels were higher (as would be expected in a drier period), the preliminary results are similar to the first round of monitoring (which showed that there was no appreciable difference between the dust levels measured from the movement of uncovered loaded coal trains and other types of freight trains).The outcomes of these investigations will help inform further consideration of measures that may be required to control and reduce dust emissions along the Hunter rail corridor.

3. EPA’s role in approval and regulation of coal mines and extensions to coal mines

NSW coal mines are required to operate in a proper and efficient manner to reduce dust emissions and in accordance with conditions of the project approval from the Department of Planning and Infrastructure (DP&I) and EPA environment protection licence. The EPA advises DP&I on the adequacy of the air quality impact assessment submitted as part of the project application and recommends approval conditions if approval is granted. The DP&I and EPA are working together to streamline the consent and licensing process and improve the transparency and enforceability of their requirements.

As outlined in its Upper Hunter Particles Air Action Plan, the EPA is reducing dust emissions from coal mines through the “Dust Stop Program”. Under this program, the EPA required all operating NSW coal mines, through PRPs attached to their environment protection licences, to assess their operations against best practice and identify feasible improvements to reduce dust emissions.

By the end of 2012, all coal mines had reported to the EPA. The reports indicated that the most significant sources of particulate matter from coal mines are wheel-generated dust, overburden handling and wind erosion from exposed surfaces, together accounting for around 80 per cent of PM10 emissions from NSW open cut coal mines. On 22 March 2013, the EPA issued all such mines with three new PRPs requiring:

- best practice controls of wheel generated dust and monitoring over a year to ensure this is being achieved
- modifying or stopping of handling of overburden during adverse weather conditions and monitoring of outcomes
- building on these initiatives and finding additional, better ways to control dust while handling overburden.

The requirements of each PRP are available by viewing individual mine licences or searching all “pollution studies and reduction programs” for “mining for coal” on the EPA’s public register of environment protection licences at www.environment.nsw.gov.au/prpoeoapp/.

Yours sincerely

BARRY BUFFIER
Chair and CEO
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Attachment

11 April 2013