



Community Environment Network Inc.

An alliance of community and environment groups.

17th April 2020

NSW Independent Bushfire Inquiry

Email: inquiries@bushfireinquiry.nsw.gov.au

Re: NSW Bushfire Inquiry

Dear Sir,

I am writing this letter to you, regarding the inquiry into the recent NSW Bushfires. In particular;

Air Pollution:

To understand how smoke causing air pollution circulates on the Central Coast and Hunter, consideration needs to be given to the Sydney Air Shed. "The Central Coast is located within the Sydney Air Shed, which is the description given to the area in and around Sydney where pollutants are trapped. (Sydney's Airshed encompasses the Hawkesbury basin, the Liverpool basin and the area east of Parramatta. Its boundaries are at the Blue Mountains to the east and south. It is approximately 4000km square kilometres in area. Due to the geographical features of the area such as the mountains and onshore wind at the Airshed's borders, and because the area forms a basin, emissions can be trapped for a lengthy amount of time, circulating across the basin until a strong wind flushes it out. The Airshed includes the Central Coast and parts of the Hunter Valley and smoke from these areas may be pushed by northerly wind over Sydney City. Smoke produced within the Sydney Air Shed stays in the shed for several days. There are many months of examples from the recent bushfires north and west of Sydney.

Health Impacts of Smoke:

Wood smoke is a serious pollutant and impacts people with asthma and other lung diseases. CEN contends that it is an unnecessary impost which seriously affects lung diseases.

Advice was sought from **NSW Health** on smoke impacts of burning. NSW Health advises that "there is no minimum level of smoke that is safe.

Short-term exposure (hours to days) can lead to:

- Irritated eyes, nose and throat
- Worsening asthma and lung diseases such as chronic bronchitis (also called chronic obstructive pulmonary disease or COPD)
- Heart attacks and arrhythmias (irregular heart beat) in people with heart disease
- Increases in hospital admissions and premature death due to diseases of the respiratory and cardiovascular systems

Long-term exposure (many years) can lead to:

- Reduced lung function
- Development of cardiovascular and respiratory diseases
- Increased rate of disease progression
- Reduction in life expectancy"

The **Asthma Foundation** advises that 9% of the population suffers from asthma and that this is made worse by smoke. Hence, the risks to health need to be taken into consideration in any decisions about activities that may increase air pollution from increased hazard reduction by burning."

CEN supports the submission of the Nature Conservation Council (NCC), in particular the need to use more mechanical and non burning methods of hazard reduction. Otherwise there will be an inevitable increase in pollution as landholders light up more frequently. Given that there is no Safe level for smoke inhalation, we need policies to improve air quality throughout the Sydney Basin where nearly 5 million people breathe the air and smoke, sometimes for months at a time. Discretionary burning in the Sydney Air Shed needs to be strictly controlled.

However, due to the health impacts of smoke production, every effort should be made to ensure that the smoke generated by fuel reduction occurs then air pollution must be minimised.



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