

**From:** [Pela Soupourzis](#)  
**To:** [airpollutioninquiry](#)  
**Subject:** Re: Submission into the health impacts of air pollution in Victoria  
**Date:** Thursday, 22 April 2021 8:32:13 PM

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Pela Soupourzis

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## **PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO THE HEALTH IMPACTS OF AIR POLLUTION IN VICTORIA**

### **INTRODUCTION**

I make this submission to the Environment and Planning Committee inquiring into the health impacts of air pollution in Victoria, with a focus on diesel pollution from trucks and polluting industries in the Inner West, that constitute human, animal and environmental rights violations.

The World Health Organisation states that air pollution leads to the premature death of over four million people annually worldwide, as a result of increased mortality from heart disease, stroke, acute respiratory infections and lung cancer<sup>1</sup>. In Australia air pollution from heavy vehicles and industry poses a major threat to human health and accounts for approximately 3000 deaths a year<sup>2</sup>. It is important to note that these staggering figures fail to take into account the morbidity rates suffered by the population due to exposure to air pollution.

The Inner West is home to chemical industries, an oil refinery, toxic landfills, the Port of Melbourne trucking and freight logistics and Victoria's busiest freeway, the West Gate Freeway. A report presented to the Victorian Government by the Inner West Air Quality and Community Reference Group in August 2020, finds that inadequate regulation, poor planning and a lack of air pollution monitoring is exposing the community to serious health risks. Residents in the Inner West have some of the worst health statistics in Victoria, with high rates of diseases attributed to toxic air pollution. This includes high hospitalisation rates for cardio-pulmonary diseases, asthma, stroke and above average lung cancer incidence. These illnesses cannot be attributed to age, smoking rates, obesity rates or socio-economic status which are all close to or below average<sup>3</sup>.

The Inner West has thousands of trucks, including B Doubles, traversing residential streets daily just metres away from homes and schools. Diesel exhaust from trucks consists of noxious gasses such as nitrous oxide, sulphur monoxide and carbon monoxide, and carcinogenic particulate substances known as diesel particulate matter (DPM). These toxic pollutants are detrimental to human health<sup>4</sup>.

### **PERSONAL EXPERIENCE LIVING IN A HEAVILY POLLUTED AREA**

I have been a resident of Yarraville for approximately fifteen years and live on a road that has been designated a major arterial route for heavy vehicles by the Roads Corporation of Victoria (VicRoads). Thousands upon thousands of trucks, including B Doubles, use this road as a thoroughfare every day, throughout all hours of the day and night, only metres away from my home. Over the past decade I have witnessed truck numbers increase exponentially and it is extremely concerning that the Government has forecast these numbers will double once the West Gate Tunnel opens in 2023<sup>5</sup>.

My home is literally coated in carcinogenic particulates from diesel exhaust fumes that leach inside through ventilation grills and gaps in doors and windows, such that my window sills are covered in soot. I do not open my windows or doors for fresh air and am reluctant to exercise outdoors due to the pungent diesel fumes. The extremely high noise levels generated by these heavy vehicles cause sleep deprivation and auditory issues, necessitating the use of ear plugs. My companion animal frequently sits on the window sills, inadvertently ingesting and inhaling these pollutants which may cause future health complications.

Furthermore, these heavy vehicles pose a serious safety concern. On 30, December 2020, the Maribyrnong Truck Action Group reported on an incident involving a truck which could have seriously injured or killed someone. The front wheel came off the truck, flew along the footpath and into the front garden before hitting the front part of the house, causing significant damage.

I have contacted the Maribyrnong City Council, VicRoads, Department of Transport, Victoria Police, the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) and Victorian Government ministers such as Jacinta Allan MP and Ben Carroll MP on numerous occasions, to raise my concerns regarding the health and safety issues associated with heavy vehicles using my residential street, however to date they have largely been ignored.

### **ADDRESSING THE TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY**

The state wide, practical real time cost effective air pollution mitigation strategies that I recommend the Committee consider are as follow:

- Implementation of truck bans from residential streets in the Inner West (such as Somerville Rd, Francis St and Williamstown Rd), with the exception of trucks servicing local businesses. As DPM can act like a gas and stay airborne for long periods of time<sup>4</sup>, truck curfews are ineffective at mitigating the deleterious effects of air pollution.
- Phasing out old trucks and introducing Euro 6 emissions standards for new trucks, such as those introduced in Europe in 2015, with the aim of reducing levels of harmful pollutants.
- Moving container yards away from residential areas, negating the need for trucks to access them by using residential streets.
- Installing pollution control equipment (filtration) on the West Gate Tunnel's ventilation system. Filtration systems in road tunnels around the world have been demonstrated to effectively remove harmful pollutants from their surrounding air sheds.
- Increasing the use of rail to transport freight.

In order to ensure that Victorian air quality continues to track towards meeting and exceeding current international best practice standards and is enforced I recommend that:

- Victorian air pollution laws are strengthened and enforced by local councils and the EPA.
- The locations of air pollution monitoring are increased and improved. The monitors should be installed on busy residential roads, to improve accurate data collection.
- Access to air pollution data and health data is readily available to the public and in other languages.

In determining the impact of economic and population growth on air pollution and health outcomes it is important to note that the projected increase in Melbourne's population over the coming years will intensify the effects of air pollution. It is imperative that the Victorian Government, EPA and local councils acknowledge this issue and implement strategies immediately that will mitigate these deleterious effects, such as banning all trucks from residential streets, introducing Euro 6 engine emissions standards, installing filtration systems on the ventilation stacks of the West Gate Tunnel Project and holding the Port of Melbourne accountable for the air pollution impacts of its operations.

To strengthen commitments across all Victorian Government portfolios to reduce air pollution and minimize the impact on health it is imperative that all levels of the Victorian Government acknowledge that freight movement in the Inner West is a health, planning and environmental issue and that effective mitigations must be implemented immediately to mitigate the detrimental effects of air pollution. For example, as previously noted truck curfews do not stop diesel exhaust or protect human health. The EPA monitored truck curfews

introduced by VicRoads in 2020 on Francis Street in Yarraville. The results of this study found that “the reduction in PM10 and PM2.5 concentrations appears to have been mostly influenced by weather conditions, rather than the impact of truck curfews”<sup>6</sup>. Therefore the only acceptable solution is to prohibit trucks from using residential roads as a matter of urgency, rather than implementing ineffective truck curfews.

I would also like to highlight other important impacts that heavy vehicle cause:

- Noise Pollution- According to the World health Organisation, vehicular noise is second only to air pollution in the impact it has on health. It is a major cause, not only of hearing loss, but also of heart disease, learning problems in children and sleep disturbance<sup>7</sup>.
- Damage to property- residential streets are not designed to serve as arterial routes for heavy vehicles. The vibrations generated by trucks impact the structural integrity of homes with many residents noticing large cracks developing in walls.
- Safety concerns
- Economic impact- with government projections indicating that truck numbers using Williamstown Road will double following the opening of the West Gate Tunnel, property values are likely to decrease.
- The health of companion animals and wildlife is also impacted by air pollution. “Air pollutants can poison wildlife through the disruption of endocrine function, organ injury, increased vulnerability to stresses and diseases, lower reproductive success, and possible death.”<sup>8</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Clean air is a human, animal and environmental right. In light of the deleterious effects that air pollution has on human health, it is imperative that the Victorian Government makes significant changes to improve the health and well-being of residents of the Inner West, by implementing strategies to reduce air pollution using the aforementioned recommendations.

## APPENDIX

1. [https://www.who.int/health-topics/air-pollution#tab=tab\\_1](https://www.who.int/health-topics/air-pollution#tab=tab_1)
2. Australian Government, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Australian Burden of Disease study: Impact and causes of illness and death in Australia, 2011 (Revised 2016)*
3. <https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/sustainability/inner-west-air-quality-reference-group>
4. <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au>
5. <https://westgatetunnelproject.vic.gov.au/library/environment-effects-statement>
6. <https://www.vgls.vic.gov.au>
7. <https://www.transportenvironment.org>
8. <https://www.canada.ca>ecosystem>

