



20th April, 2021

To whom it may concern,

Re: YCAN submission to Victorian Air Pollution Inquiry

Yarra Climate Action Now (YCAN) is a community climate action group based in inner-city Melbourne, with a membership of more than 1000 people concerned about climate change and sustainability. Our members live, work or study within the City of Yarra. YCAN is our way to take action into our hands; we think globally but act locally.

YCAN recognises that human and environmental health are inextricably linked. YCAN strongly identifies that our actions to reduce our carbon footprint by decreasing reliance on fossil fuels for electricity generation, transport and heating will have wide reaching benefits across the health sector, the environment and the economy.

The causes of air pollution in Victoria result mainly from the burning of fuel, such as motor vehicles, coal fired power stations, wood fired heaters, planned burns in logging coupes/planned burns to reduce bush fire risk, factories and other industries. Agriculture and mining are also known contributors. The burning of fuels are a source of particulate matter and chemicals, which are known to be detrimental to lung and circulatory health¹

YCAN strongly advocates for government action to reduce air pollution. It is estimated that air pollution causes the deaths of between 2616 and 4884 people per year in Australia, results in serious health outcomes such as stroke, lung cancer and heart disease and contributes a significant cost to the health system, in the vicinity of A\$24 billion per year.²

In reviewing current air pollution information, it is concerning to YCAN that Australia is falling behind similarly ranked OECD countries in terms of protections and laws designed to reduce the risks of air pollution to human health in Victoria. It is imperative at this time to consider the impacts on our urban and rural communities, the impacts on child development, on premature deaths and to ensure we take strong action to ensure our pollution controls are derived from a strong scientific base. It is also of significant interest to YCAN that many measures to address the impacts of air

¹ Clean air for all Victorians- Victoria's air quality statement 2018,
https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0025/125719/Clean-Air-Statement.pdf

² The People's Clean Air Action Plan, Environmental Justice Australia,
<https://www.envirojustice.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/VICTORIA-Clean-Air-Action-Plan-2021.pdf>

pollution have implications for improving our climate change outcomes. For example, changing a wood fired heater to a heat pump operating on renewable energy will reduce emissions and the impacts on native forests. The rapid uptake of electric vehicles charged with renewable energy sources will drive down emissions from fossil fuels and improve air quality.

The largest source of air pollution in Victoria is coal fired power generation. Victorian air pollution standards lag behind standards in other countries, where air pollution removal technology is required by legislation. In Victoria, Latrobe valley residents are subjected to a cocktail of particulate matter and chemicals including mercury, sulphur dioxide and oxides of nitrogen. Yallourn power station is a potent example where high emissions of air pollutants have been identified, but there is inaction to install technology to remove the pollutants from the air. Available technology can remove 90% of particulate matter, remove mercury using bag filters, use scrubbers to remove sulphur dioxide and remove oxides of nitrogen with catalytic reduction technology.³ The lack of regulation of emissions has resulted in Victorian power stations being identified as ‘some of the more poorly controlled coal-fired power stations in the world’.⁴

In Melbourne the impact of wood smoke on cool winter days is recognised as responsible for most breaches of air quality standards. The smoke from wood fired heaters is similar to that of a bushfire and is equally as detrimental to health. The smoke contains fine particulate matter, which penetrates the lung wall and can enter the bloodstream. It is estimated that there are 900,000 wood fired heaters in operation in Australia, with potential health costs of A\$3.4 billion a year.⁵

Vehicle pollution from combustion engines continues to have a significant impact on Melbourne’s air quality, contributing up to 70% of urban air pollution². In addition transport is the third largest source of greenhouse gas emissions, and has the highest rate of growth. Australia is also known for having the second worst vehicle efficiency internationally.⁶

The City of Yarra is a highly urbanised area, containing a number of high traffic routes including the Eastern Freeway and Hoddle Street. The emissions arising from traffic congestion comprise a number of pollutants including particulate matter, ozone, carbon monoxide, oxides of nitrogen and sulphur dioxide. In addition, Australia has the lowest ranked fuel quality out of 35 OECD countries, and also continues to actively import diesel vehicles. This is contrary to OECD direction on diesel vehicles, which acknowledges the particulate matter pollution from these vehicles as being smaller and therefore more dangerous to human health². In relation to the local Yarra area and heavy car use, there have been some disturbing findings relating to potential adverse health impacts. Independent testing at a childcare centre located 15 metres from Hoddle Street in Collingwood in 2014 found that fine

³ Yallourn’s toxic air pollution- a danger to health, <https://environmentvictoria.org.au/yallourns-toxic-air-pollution-a-danger-to-health/>

⁴ Exposed: The dirty secrets of Victoria’s coal burning power stations, <https://environmentvictoria.org.au/2018/09/21/exposed-the-dirty-secrets-of-victorias-coal-burning-power-stations/>

⁵ Like having a truck idling in your living room’: the toxic cost of wood-fired heaters, <https://theconversation.com/like-having-a-truck-idling-in-your-living-room-the-toxic-cost-of-wood-fired-heaters-140737>

⁶ Transport emissions: Driving down care pollution in cities, <https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/resources/transport-fact-sheet/>

particulate matter averaged at 11.4 micrograms per cubic metre. The Environment Protection Agency (EPA) has an annual standard of no more than 8 micrograms⁷

European and American cities have also implemented anti-idling of vehicles legislation, particularly in proximity to children and older people. Victoria could follow the lead of initiatives such as The No Idling Project in the United States, which has succeeded in the education of parents around schools to turn off their vehicles. Parents were very receptive to enacting behaviour change when adequately informed on the detrimental impacts of breathing exhaust fumes on developing lungs, risks of asthma and other adverse effects.⁸

YCAN is aware that the Environment Protection Agency (EPA) is failing to monitor air quality in a reliable way. This includes failing to act on air quality breaches detected in the Latrobe valley and failure to implement roadside testing at high traffic locations close to schools, child care, hospitals and aged care facilities.²

The people of Victoria are also awaiting action on The Victorian Air Quality strategy, which was initiated in 2018 but not finalised by the state government.

YCAN recommends a number of strategies that would result in a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, reduction in air pollution and improved health outcomes.

- The rapid transition to renewable energy with concurrent closure of coal fired power stations.
- Policy to support the rapid transition to electric vehicles including tax incentives and green energy charging infrastructure.
- Support and promotion of strategies to encourage people back onto public transport and out of petrol powered vehicles, post Covid 19.
- Policy and public education to support transition away from the use of woodfired heating. Provision of subsidies or buy back schemes to facilitate the purchase of alternative, renewable energy powered heating.
- Ban the burning of post logging waste in private and state owned logging operations.

YCAN also supports strategies which will have a direct impact on human health:

- Implement education strategies to inform people of risks to children's health and development resulting from car idling.
- Implement bans on car idling in school and childcare zones/sport clubs. Install buffer zones around schools/child care zones and aged care facilities.
- Initiate interim measures for reducing air pollution from coal fired power stations by retrofitting appropriate technology/setting strong stack emission limits that are in line with international standards.
- Implementation of the People's Clean Air Action plan, which has been developed by Environmental Justice Australia in collaboration with health experts, international pollution regulation experts and community groups in areas impacted by air pollution.
- Request that the Victorian government finalises The Victorian Air Quality Strategy.
- Ensure the EPA has the capacity to effectively monitor air pollution via adequate resourcing and legislative powers.

⁷ Childcare centres and car exhaust: a dangerous mix, <https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/childcare-centres-and-car-exhaust-a-dangerous-mix>

⁸ <http://www.idleoff.com.au>

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the inquiry.

On behalf of YCAN

Lisa Magnusson

