

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Inquiry: Inquiry into the Health Impacts of Air Pollution in Victoria

Hearing Date: 28 April 2021

Questions taken on notice

Directed to: Steven Piasente, Latrobe City Council

1. Mr Melhem Page no. 6

Question asked.

You mentioned earlier the standards and feedback from certain sections of the community about whether the Australian standards are up to scratch in comparison with world standards - Has Latrobe been able to do a bit of a comparison between our standards and specifically which countries we are comparing against? You are in the part of the world where you have got some heavy industries and I would be interested to get your view on that.

Response:

It is considered appropriate that the Victorian Government's Air Quality Strategy (which Latrobe City Council understand is to be progressed) should seek to bring about changes to the laws that regulate ambient air quality and emissions limits.

It is understood that the strategy will progress many of the opportunities explored at the Clean Air Summit held August 2018.

Acknowledging the concerns raised by the Latrobe City community regarding outdated standards applied to the assessment of industrial emissions, Latrobe City Council would support a direction whereby the EPA standards were to be reviewed and amended in alignment with best practice international standards.

The Environment Protection Authority are considered to be well placed to pursue such changes.

The Victorian Auditor General's Office (VAGO) audit of Environment Protection Authority (EPA) air monitoring obligations were completed March 2018. The recommendations of the auditor are supported.

An example of real time air monitoring is provided by the Office of Environment and Heritage in NSW provides real-time air pollution information, including the Upper Hunter Air Quality Monitoring Network. Victoria has no similar data capture or reporting systems, rather it is understood that the EPA AirWatch displays air quality information on a 48-hour and 1- hour rolling average.

As previously indicated, the Victorian Government is supported to progress its Air Quality Strategy – which amongst other priorities is to include actions to make better use of air quality monitoring.

As part of Council’s planning assessment of the Used Lead Acid Battery (ULAB) Recycling Facility, Council commissioned an independent environmental assessment by Monarc Environmental. The assessment provided the following information:

Monarc is not aware of any country (or component State/jurisdiction) that has banned the processing of ULAB/SLABs.

International Standards

Ambient air quality standards for lead in air:

Place	Limit	Units	Averaging Time
United States	0.15	µg/m ³	3 months
California	1.5	µg/m ³	30 day
Canada (Ontario)	0.5	µg/m ³	24 hour
Canada (Ontario)	0.2	µg/m ³	30 day
Victoria	3	µg/m ³	1 hour
Victoria	0.5	µg/m ³	1 year
Australia	0.5	µg/m ³	1 year
UK/EU Directive	0.5	µg/m ³	1 year
New Zealand	0.2	µg/m ³	3 months

Whilst a direct comparison between standards is only possible when the averaging time being used is the same, it is evident from the above table that a number of other countries do have lower (more stringent) air quality standards than those that apply in Victoria. The lowest limit is the 3 month rolling average of 0.15 µg/m³ which is the U.S National Ambient Air Quality Standard for lead.

However, the magnitude of those differences is not large and from the data reviewed by Monarc, the proposed Hazelwood North ULAB recycling facility would achieve compliance with the air quality standards in any of the countries/ regions listed in the table above.

Monarc has not located and is not aware of any other jurisdiction that has a lower (more stringent) air quality standard for lead than those listed in the table above.

Comparisons with other states and territories is also included in the enclosed document prepared by Monarc Environmental.

2. Ms Bath Page no. 7

Question asked.

ULAB-Whether we actually asked for an EES or not, but we certainly had said to the minister that it was not the right decision, this community had opposed it and the council had, and that it should be reversed.

Response:

Council did not ask for an EES in our formal submission to EPA in relation to the works approval application.

At the 20B Conference facilitated by the EPA, one of the key topics was that an EES should be completed, an action was that:

EPA to confirm with DELWP the outcome of the applicant's self-referral to DELWP regarding the need for an Environment Effect Statement (EES) and provide details in its Works Approval Assessment Report.

The works approval assessment report details that:

DELWP has confirmed that the applicant was able to demonstrate the EES referral criteria were not met.

3. Dr Cumming Page no. 12

Question asked.

Would you actually provide the inquiry more information about the system that you spoke about, the federal system? Because I would love to know how long that system has been used in Latrobe, the system that you mentioned that the feds gave you funding for.

Response:

Latrobe Valley Information Network (LVIN) is not a federal system but was partially funded by the Smarter Cities initiative (\$700,000.00), the rest of the project is funded by the system owner Attentis (\$1M) with no funding support from Council.

The funding was supplied to Attentis not Latrobe City and Attentis worked with Council officers to identify appropriate locations to facilitate the system installation.

Attentis continues to fund maintenance and upkeep from within its own funds.

The LVIN is a live community and firefighter warning, information and local weather tool comprising of 44 units that details the actual localised wind, temperature, humidity and air quality readings across the Latrobe City municipality. Residents throughout the region can access live information to reduce exposure to events, creating next level understanding of live conditions, warnings to create the resilience needed to reduce the overall impact on the community.

With the new Attentis app now available, entire communities and fire responders can view real time fire and weather conditions to make informed decisions during extreme atmospheric events.

Since 2019 this technology provides a previously unavailable reliable level of information that will greatly assist resource positioning, situational awareness for firefighters, notably on the front line, to be instantly aware of changes in wind speed directions and health impacts (smoke concentration levels and fire movement) and enable the local community to remain informed during an event when communication and resources can be limited. During the 2019/2020 NSW and East Gippsland Fires the Latrobe City Council actively accessed the site to review the smoke, health conditions and air quality throughout the region to ensure vulnerable residents remained indoors, reducing the level of exposure.

The community experience and the importance of valuable on the fire ground weather intelligence and air quality that this system provides is an important future platform to keep responders informed and safe.

4. Dr Cumming Page no. 12

Question asked.

How could the air quality regulatory framework be better integrated with local government processes and responsibilities in this area?

Response:

Local Government does not presently hold legislative responsibilities for air quality monitoring, rather have established the LVIN in the interest of community health and ability to respond to a range of climatic conditions / events, including air pollution.

Latrobe City Council understands that the responsibility for air quality regulation sits with the EPA. It is considered that the EPA are best placed and appropriately skilled to provide this function, despite prior shortcomings identified by the Victorian Auditor General's Office VAGO within their 2018 audit of Environment Protection Authority (EPA) air monitoring obligations.

VAGO recommended that the EPA:

- Expand its air quality monitoring network, including reviewing and updating its current air quality management plan and better aligning monitoring coverage with air pollution risks.
- Improve its air quality reporting, by introducing a rigorous data quality review process and developing readable and easily accessible reports, highlighting assessments against standards and recorded exceedances.
- Expand and update its knowledge of Victoria's air quality, through completing a comprehensive emissions inventory, improving oversight of high-risk operators' air quality monitoring and better understanding and responding to air emissions.
- Recommended that the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) and EPA clarify government agencies' roles and responsibilities in air quality management, and ensure accountabilities are understood and coordination is achieved.

Latrobe City Council supports the implementation of Actions outlined by the Victorian Auditor General's Office.

5. Dr Cumming Page no. 12

Question asked.

Do you believe that the government or the minister should actually provide an environment effects statement in relation to the battery lead smelter?

Response:

Council's written submission to the inquiry did not refer to the need for Environmental Effects Statement (EES) being required in association with the Minister's consideration of the ULAB Battery Recycling application.

Latrobe City Council has not previously determined to request that the Minister to direct that an EES be prepared.

Ministerial Guidelines for assessment of environmental effects provides direction as to when an EES may be required. This guideline emphasises projects with potential for adverse environmental effects that could be significant in a regional or state context. In this regard, the proposed ULAB development may not be considered significant in a regional or state wide context.

The Guidelines does refer to instances of potential exposure of a human community to severe or chronic health or safety hazards over the short or long term, due to emissions to air or water; however the Guidelines also acknowledge that the identification of potential significant effects does not indicate that an EES will necessarily be required.'

6. Dr Cumming Page no. 13

Question asked.

How long has the community been able to use that app?

Response:

The app went live on 28 May 2020 for anybody to use.