

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

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

Melbourne—Tuesday, 29 June 2021

*(via videoconference)*

#### MEMBERS

Ms Sonja Terpstra—Chair

Mr Clifford Hayes—Deputy Chair

Dr Matthew Bach

Ms Melina Bath

Dr Catherine Cumming

Mr Stuart Grimley

Mr Andy Meddick

Mr Cesar Melhem

Dr Samantha Ratnam

Ms Nina Taylor

#### PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

Ms Georgie Crozier

Mr David Davis

Dr Tien Kieu

Mrs Beverley McArthur

Mr Tim Quilty

**WITNESSES**

Ms Clare Sheppard,

Ms Patsy Toop, OAM, and

Mr Bert Boere, Inner West Air Quality Community Reference Group;

Mr Martin Wurt, President, Maribyrnong Truck Action Group; and

Ms Caroline Cittarelli.

**The CHAIR:** I declare open the Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee's public hearing for the Inquiry into the Health Impacts of Air Pollution in Victoria. Please ensure that mobile phones have been switched to silent and that background noise is minimised.

I would like to begin this hearing by respectfully acknowledging the Aboriginal peoples, the traditional custodians of the various lands we are gathered on today, and pay my respects to their ancestors, elders and families. I particularly welcome any elders or community members who are here today to impart their knowledge of this issue to the committee or who are watching the broadcast of these proceedings. I would also like to take the opportunity to welcome any members of the public who may be watching these proceedings via the live broadcast as well.

I will take the opportunity to introduce committee members to you. I am Sonja Terpstra; I am the Chair of the Environment and Planning Committee. Appearing with me are Mr Cesar Melhem, Dr Catherine Cumming and Dr Samantha Ratnam.

All evidence that is taken today is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide during the hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during this hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded, and you will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing. Transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

Now what I will ask each of you to do—and I will invite you each to do this in a second—is please state for the Hansard record your name and the organisation you are appearing on behalf. Perhaps if I start with you, Clare.

**Ms SHEPPARD:** My name is Clare Sheppard, and I am here representing the Inner West Air Quality Community Reference Group.

**The CHAIR:** Great, thank you. Patsy.

**Ms TOOP:** My name is Patsy Toop, and I am here as the Chair of the Inner West Air Quality Community Reference Group.

**The CHAIR:** Bert.

**Mr BOERE:** Bert Boere, member of Inner West Air Quality Community Reference Group and also member of Brooklyn Residents Action Group.

**The CHAIR:** And I had on my paper Geoff. Do we have Geoff?

**Ms TOOP:** Unfortunately Geoff is having to attend to an ill relative, so no.

**The CHAIR:** Not a problem. All right, Martin.

**Mr WURT:** My name is Martin Wurt. I am President of MTAG, the Maribyrnong Truck Action Group.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. And Caroline.

**Ms CITTARELLI:** Caroline Cittarelli. I am just a resident of West Sunshine who wants to talk about what I am experiencing.

**The CHAIR:** Fabulous. Thank you all so much for that, and with that I will now invite each of you to make your opening remarks. If you could please keep them to about 5 minutes—I know this will be challenging, but I will give you an indication as we approach the end of that time. I might invite you, Clare, first to perhaps share your presentation and for your group to start your opening remarks. Thank you. And if you could all just keep your microphones on mute if you are not speaking, that will help. Thanks.

**Mr BOERE:** Right. I am off first, am I?

**Ms TOOP:** No, I think I am just going to do a quick introduction, that is all.

**Mr BOERE:** Okay.

**Ms TOOP:** Once the slides come up. Thank you.

### **Visual presentation.**

**Ms TOOP:** Great. Thank you very much, everybody. The Inner West Air Quality Community Reference Group was formed by various government ministers, and we were tasked with researching and writing a report on the impacts of poor air quality on residents in the inner west of Melbourne. The reference area was Brimbank, Maribyrnong and Hobsons Bay councils. I was very fortunate to be the Chair of that group. We are not going to talk about any transport-related issues as we believe that that has been covered off by MTAG. We have common concerns and interests in that area, and we also have common members of both groups. So perhaps we could go to the second slide. Thanks, Clare, and I will leave that one to you.

The health of the inner west is demonstrated here, comparing to the Australian average, and the three councils in the reference area have higher rates of heart failure, asthma and heart disease and lung cancer. Interestingly enough, for example, Maribyrnong does have, you would have thought, a higher percentage of elderly residents, but in actual fact the average age range there is much, much younger, yet they have a very high health impact as a consequence of pollution. We are committed to the ongoing funding of local medical resources commensurate with the greater air pollution risks from the air pollution in the inner west that we experience. We want to have undertaken a health risk assessment of the public health impacts caused by air pollution in hotspots in the inner west, including the Brooklyn residential precinct. We can move to slide 3.

Perhaps if I just introduce this. We had 26 recommendations, 66 supporting actions and 10 priority recommendations contained in our very comprehensive report: on monitoring, analysis and reporting, four recommendations; we had regulatory and policy environment, four recommendations; transport, which we are not covering today, six recommendations; industry, seven recommendations; and planning, five recommendations.

We build on the reforms of the environment protection framework to ensure that government policy and statutory framework development is undertaken, and we want that prioritised. The priority recommendations were to empower the EPA to act, and that of course is happening with effect from 1 July, when a more proactive response is being undertaken by the Environment Protection Authority.

That is your slide, Bert.

**Mr BOERE:** Okay. I have been a long-term resident here for quite some decades. And I guess it has come from us because of the impacts we are seeing in this area. Brooklyn, being south of Geelong Road, is impacted a lot from the commercial operations to the north of us on Geelong Road. Historically that area there was quarrying; later on, landfill. But these days it tends to be reclamation of materials, mainly concrete crushing.

That is an impact that is causing our high PM10 readings here. We started the Brooklyn Residents Action Group about 18 years ago. It varies a bit from year to year, but most years it has been over the limits. Physically here you can see the results in the build-up on Donalds Road and Geelong Road. In fact the build-up on the nature strips and median strip is that high that every number of years VicRoads comes along and shaves about

150 millimetres—6 inches—of build-up off the nature strips and the median strips. That also lands in our gutters. Where I live, if you do not flush the gutters out about three times a year, you will end up with grass growing in the dust in your gutters and then the potential in the older houses of backflooding down into your walls.

**The CHAIR:** Just letting you know you have got about a minute left.

**Mr BOERE:** Those are just the visible effects you can see, aside from the health effects that you do not readily see until you have got some real problems.

**Ms TOOP:** Thanks, Bert. So basically we wanted to fast-track the implementation of the *Brooklyn Evolution* strategy 2016: identify and eliminate the sources of dust emissions; and, as you can see on the slide, reduce major risk landfills which pose, you know, problems in terms of local air quality; and move existing industrial premises. Perhaps, Clare, if you could just follow up on the final slide.

**Ms SHEPPARD:** Yes, sure. So some of the recommendations related to the planning framework that exists in Victoria, and we recommended that consistency be applied across various jurisdictions to improve environmental and amenity outcomes. This would require amending the planning framework to strengthen enforcement powers and penalties for breaches of planning permit conditions related to offsite emissions, and to direct penalty payments to local environmental improvements related to those fines. Review and amend the as-of-right provisions—one of the historical impacts of industry in the inner west is that when they were first constructed they were outer-suburban areas and now they are quite central to Melbourne, so the provisions that were set at the time that those businesses were established still exist and are not able to be amended unless the use of the land changes. We would also request that industries that emit a high level of air pollution be required to monitor what they are emitting and report that to government, and we also prepared a prioritised list of actions for *Plan Melbourne 2017–2050* to improve air quality outcomes.

**The CHAIR:** Great. Thanks so much for that presentation. I will now ask Martin, if you would like to present your 5-minute opening spiel, and then I will come to you, Caroline, after that.

### Visual presentation.

**Mr WURT:** So MTAG is a volunteer residents group, and we have been campaigning for a reduction in truck numbers using residential streets in the City of Maribyrnong for almost two decades now. Next slide. The City of Maribyrnong in Melbourne's inner west is located between the Port of Melbourne and warehouses and distribution centres further out west. As a result, we experience around 8 million truck movements each year through our city. These trucks emit massive amounts of air pollution and impact heavily on our community's health. This is a long-entrenched problem for us. The freight routes that these trucks use are not freeways or highways; they are our residential streets, with schools, kindergartens and other community facilities. The trucks are often just metres from our homes on streets laid out over 100 years ago. You can see just in those photos down there the close proximity of those trucks to the houses, schoolkids with trucks behind them and cyclists with trucks not even a metre away from them.

Diesel exhaust is a known carcinogen and contains a cocktail of chemicals. Monitoring carried out over the years has always shown that Maribyrnong has some of the worst air quality in the state; however, new data that MTAG just released last Friday is truly alarming. It has found breaches in state air quality objectives every 10 days on average in Yarraville. This is very alarming of course for our community.

This graph here is from the data collected by MTAG. We installed an air monitor from Queensland University of Technology, and we had 12 months of data analysed by the EPA. This shows PM<sub>2.5</sub> concentrations in Footscray and Yarraville. The red line is the air quality objective set by the state government, and it clearly shows there for Yarraville multiple breaches that average out to one every 10 days. These readings were also taken adjacent to a block of land where a childcare centre has just been approved for construction, and MTAG does not believe that you could find a more polluted corner in all of Melbourne to place children for care. What we are doing by putting children in locations like this is committing them to a lifetime of respiratory illness.

I see this graph here was just shown previously as well, but it is really quite alarming. It is showing the hospitalisation rates for the inner west. You will see that Maribyrnong is the green one at the top. All of these figures were alarming for Maribyrnong, Brimbank and Hobsons Bay, but particularly when you look at

Maribyrnong there, our rates are way above that Australian average—the line coming down the middle there. It is incredibly alarming for us. Also, hospital admission rates with respiratory elements for children aged zero to 16 are the highest in the state. We really feel that this is an outrageous situation—that for a state that prides itself on its livability, this is not livability.

Austrroads, who is the peak body for Australian road transport and traffic agencies, has just released a report looking into the age of Australia's truck fleet. It found that ours at 15 years old is one of the oldest in OECD countries. I think it is only Mexico and one other country that has an older truck fleet. This means that the vast majority of trucks on our inner-urban streets have little emission controls and are vastly more polluting than equivalent trucks in Europe or the United States. They found that up to 56 per cent of the trucks on our streets are only Euro 3 compliant or worse. I would just like to point out Euro 3 is a 21-year-old standard, and Europe is now at Euro 6 compliance. We are so far behind best practice.

This report, for the first time, puts a dollar value on the health costs of older trucks. It found for each of these older trucks operating in urban areas it costs up to \$21 000 per year per truck in health costs. They also estimate that if we actually removed these trucks, it could lead to a health savings of up to \$1.14 billion over a seven-year period. You can obviously see from those figures that this is a massive cost to our community, not just in health but in dollar values as well.

So I suppose the question is: what can be done? And there is no one solution to this problem. We need a range of solutions that include phasing out older trucks, establishing low-emission zones to protect key community areas such as schools, more truck bans and curfews, more freight on rail and changes to land use policy to stop schools and childcare centres being built on heavily polluted roads, and we also need the port of Melbourne to reduce their emissions. Our health depends on this. I am just going to leave you now with a really quick video montage for those people who have not really visited Yarraville in the inner west, just to show you what these trucks actually look like and what some of the impacts are like on our residential streets.

**Video shown.**

**Mr WURT:** Okay. That is it from me. Hopefully my timing worked. I will stop sharing there. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you so much for that, Martin. Caroline, we will come to you now. If you could give a 5-minute presentation, that would be great.

**Ms CITTARELLI:** Well, I am a proud resident of Sunshine West. I agree with Martin about the trucks. It is absolutely shocking. I live in truck city. I am also a nurse—a sexual health nurse—a grandmother and very active in the community. I am here today to share with you the most embarrassing and unfortunate part of living in Sunshine West, and that is the foul and offensive odour that permeates my home and the community and has done so for the past 17 years that I have been here and, I know, more. The foul and disgusting smell, which can be described as similar to sewage, has continuously forced me to close my windows and doors in the heat of summer when a breeze could be passing through, to avoid barbecues or lunches with my family in my outdoor dining area or, when I have my grandchildren around, to avoid the backyard altogether. This is totally unacceptable.

These foul odour emissions are insidious. They do affect my health, and they have affected my health. Overwhelmingly the impact the odour has had on my health is the impact on my sleep. I suffer greatly from broken sleep and insomnia, and the odour permeates my bedroom windows, causing great discomfort in my sleeping environment. In the past few months, being housebound to recover from a serious surgery, I have also noted an impact on my sinuses, with constant throat and eye irritation. As a healthcare worker this has caused compounded stress to my return-to-work activities, as I need to ensure my symptoms related to COVID-19 are treated seriously. This has forced me to take multiple days off work as well as being tested for COVID-19 when these symptoms appear, further extending my sick leave and inability to attend work.

Late in 2019 I decided to do something more practical about the issue and contacted the EPA to ensure someone was aware of the toxic impact of the odour on my life and the enjoyment of my community and home. The EPA advised me to keep a log of when I notice the smell and contact them on those occasions. It was through this process and the COVID-19 pandemic that we realised that the smell must be attributed to industry and contaminants emitted from particular factories in the area. During the 112 days of lockdown in Victoria—Victoria's second and longest lockdown—the smell was absent, totally absent. It was such a relief to

no longer be affected by the sewage odour while I was eating, while I was having breakfast. I could garden and I could enjoy my suburb without fear or anxiety of the foul smell wafting past.

However, once workers were back to their normal duties post lockdown, sometime in November, I noticed the smell returning. That was also when I read an article in the *Star Weekly* written by journalist Tara Murray. Tara's article noted that the EPA was receiving increased complaints from residents of Sunshine North in regard to the AkzoNobel manufacturing plant, where it is likely volatile organic compounds would be the culprit for the odour. I believe that these VOCs are also responsible for the smell in my area, albeit from a different source. In the article Tara notes low mood, anxiety and stress, and eye, nose, throat and lung irritation can be attributed to low levels of VOCs. I hope my experience today illustrates the impact on my health and the enjoyment of my home and community that this odour has in my day-to-day life.

Clean air, free from odour that can cause so much discomfort and possible long-term health impacts, is an essential part of living a healthy and happy life. The community is seeking a long-term solution to our concerns so we too can enjoy our homes and natural environment free from the stress and health impacts of these air pollutants. Thank you for your time.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you so much, Caroline, for that. That was really heartfelt; I could see that. Thank you so much. Now I will hand over to committee members to ask questions. We will start with you, Mr Melhem.

**Mr MELHEM:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the presenters. I am going to start off. Caroline, thank you for your story. I would not mind talking to you offline in relation to this as well. If you do not mind passing on your details to the secretariat, we will do that, because I am a bit concerned about that.

**Ms CITTARELLI:** Okay, yes.

**Mr MELHEM:** Can I just start with both organisations, MTAG and the air pollution action group. First of all, thank you very much for your report—it is an excellent report—and I want to thank you for the great work you have been doing for a number of years. I can relate to all your stories. Now, have you heard from the government in relation to your report? I have read the report—some excellent ideas there and proposals—and am totally supportive of the stuff you are doing. Maybe both of you—I think that is Patricia, and Martin later on—would like to take me through your proposed solution. I think it is a great idea. We are working towards that, as you know, but the question is whether we are working fast enough. Over to you. Patricia, have you heard from the government in response to your report?

**Ms TOOP:** We have. We had a presentation provided to our group from various departments, and one of the important messages that each of the departments shared with us was the fact that, strangely enough, COVID enabled them to actually have a lot of Zoom meetings offline, and that meant that they were actually working together to determine solutions in terms of the air pollution issues that we raised. So there has been a cross-pollination between departments, which has been fabulous. They actually appreciated that and realised that there is a lot to be gained by working together. However, we are still waiting on the formal letter from the government detailing what action has been taken. There certainly has been a significant reception on the part of government—but in our view of course not enough.

It is obviously dependent upon budgetary restrictions and so forth, but there have been some solutions that have been suggested as viable options. One of them was significant in terms of the port and the conversion of the flower market and so forth—the vegetable market there—on Footscray Road into a container site and also the application of rail services to freight delivery, which as a group we believe is going to make an enormous difference to air quality issues and truck movements through our region.

**Mr MELHEM:** That is excellent. I know all about Yarraville, mate. My office is there, so I can relate to your issues in the video. Did you want to—because you are sort of part of the report as well, so what is the next step for you about an action plan, particularly with the government's recent response to particular trucks getting off the roads, and with freight? What is your view on that?

**Mr WURT:** Look, I think I back up what Patsy has just said. We have had a briefing as well from government in terms of what we can expect that response to be. We are also just still waiting for that formal response so we know exactly what is in it. I suppose also, is it enough and is it quick enough? For MTAG it is not. It was interesting; I was looking at a newspaper article just yesterday from 2006 from Peter Batchelor, who

was the roads minister at the time, promising to put empty containers on the Footscray site, promising to put freight on rail, promising to put a potentially dedicated freight route down to the port. So this is a long time coming for us. I mean, the community has been calling for action for 20 years now. There are certainly some good things in the pipeline. We certainly encourage that, but is it enough? No. When we look overseas and we look at other jurisdictions, we see how the Port of Los Angeles has reduced their diesel emissions from trucks by 90 per cent in three years. What has been proposed here is not enough and it is not quick enough.

**Mr MELHEM:** Thanks for that. I will let other people respond. Thanks, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** We will come back around. We will probably have more time. Dr Cumming.

**Mr BOERE:** Sorry, I was going to speak. I support MTAG with all the truck statements, because in the area that we are in, Millers Road has the same problems that they have as well—on top of the dust problem. So we have both.

**Mr WURT:** Thank you.

**Dr CUMMING:** Thank you, Chair. I just want to thank my community for presenting today, as well as just say that obviously I have grown up in the west. I have always known that the air quality was poor. I, like yourselves, have trusted that the governments of all the days were looking after us. Obviously I have sat on Maribyrnong council for those 20 years and have pushed quite extensively, as well as MTAG and others, to make sure that the problems that we all know and that we all experience in the way of air quality and air pollution—we all hoped that the state governments at those times were actually doing something. I was actually gobsmacked. I want to apologise to my community for not getting this as my first inquiry when I first got elected in 2019. I, probably like others, had always thought that this had already been done. To find out that the last Legislative Council committee on clear air regulations was in 1959—I guess for myself as an environmentalist, knowing that there were plenty of Greens here in Parliament, I would have thought that this would have already been done 13 years ago. So I want to make a start by saying that I wish that I had done this first and that I had got this inquiry up last year before the pandemic started, but I am glad that it is actually getting done now.

I guess my question to you all is this: I know that a lot of you have actually sat on many a committee, had many a talkfest. You have sat on the Inner West Air Quality Community Reference Group. Which of the recommendations made in those reports do you believe are urgent for the Victorian government to follow through on? And also my question to you: do you actually believe that the referent group is actually being heard by this government and that the current DELWP air quality inquiries that they have made—because when I have done my research I have found that apart from then there had never been an inquiry since 1959 and that it has actually sat in the Auditor-General's office. They have actually done work on improving air quality in 2018—DELWP did some work in 2019—

**The CHAIR:** Sorry, Dr Cumming, you have to just direct your question to who you want to answer, because it is a statement. So if we could have a question, that would be helpful.

**Dr CUMMING:** Yes. I guess my question was, Chair, the one that I made earlier, which is: which of the recommendations made in the reports that you have seen so far—and others have commented that the EPA and others have put out strategies, but they have done that before even this inquiry has taken place, so there has already been a bit of mistrust in the way of many, many, many, many community talkfests about air quality.

**The CHAIR:** Perhaps we could start with Clare. Perhaps, your question [Zoom dropout] so, perhaps a question for Clare. Could you on behalf of your group then—

**Ms SHEPPARD:** Thank you. Thank you, Dr Cumming. I believe that the changes to the *Environment Protection Act* that come into effect this year are critically important in ensuring that the impacts on our community from air quality issues are reduced. What we found in the Inner West Air Quality Community Reference Group was that there is a great team at the EPA working on air quality, but we would love to see that team be resourced and the EPA be resourced to the point where they can actually make a difference in addressing the concerns of the community.

If people ring up and say there is an odour problem, we want someone to respond, to go out and investigate and to restrict the business from impacting on us in our homes with odour or with other air quality issues.

**The CHAIR:** Martin, would you like to add anything to that?

**Mr WURT:** Certainly from MTAG's perspective, out of the recommendations in the report we want to see a clean truck program, and I think you would start with low-emission zones as well. The government has certainly got plans in the pipeline. Things like the West Gate Tunnel Project, for example, are going to remove a lot of trucks off our residential streets. But there is no filtration on the vent stacks of the tunnel, so they might be off our streets, but we will be breathing it in anyway. So let us clean up that truck fleet; it is embarrassing. At 15 years old, it is embarrassing that 56 per cent of our trucks are at only a 21-year-old-compliant emission control standard. We need to do something there. I believe the Port of Melbourne needs to take some responsibility for those businesses doing business within their yards, which then relates to trucks on our streets.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks for that. Caroline, is there anything you wanted to add there?

**Ms CITTARELLI:** Yes. I just wanted to agree about the EPA being more resourced for the inner west to come out and investigate the air pollution, the toxic malodour that we are subjected to on a daily basis, and that needs to be done immediately. It is very grave. It has to happen soon, because this has been happening too long—too, too long that we have had to put up with the horrible toxic smell in our area.

Thank you. I am sorry, but it is very emotional because it affects you in all facets of your life—mentally, physically and everything you do. If your air is toxic and it smells of sewerage continuously, you cannot live with that. It is quite horrible, and you do not feel like you are living in Australia, you feel like you are living somewhere, you know, where there is no running water. It is not fair. It is not fair at all. Anyway, thank you.

**The CHAIR:** No, thank you. That is excellent. Dr Ratnam, a question? We will come back around. We might have some more time. But Dr Ratnam, a question?

**Dr RATNAM:** Firstly, reiterating thanks to each and every one of you—for your written submissions as well, which were really comprehensive—and just acknowledging the years of tireless work you have been doing on the ground to lobby for action. It sounds like there is some movement, and I want to come back at that question about how we catalyse and hasten some of that progress. I had a particular follow-up question: Martin, in your submission—and thanks very much for that; the solution-focused frame of it is really helpful, the way it is set out, because it gives us some clear steps we can work through in our recommendations as well—you talked about the West Gate Tunnel Project, which you just referenced as well in terms of some of the emissions, around some of the improvements they could have made to air quality, kind of overall improving the air quality, including tunnel filtration, the displaced traffic and pollution barriers. Are you able to elaborate, just for the sake of the committee to get a sense of some of those things that they could get on with doing to actually improve air quality as that project rolls out?

**Mr WURT:** Yes, certainly filtration on the vent stacks would be where you would start. During the EES process the recommendations out of the—what does the 'S' stand for in 'EES'? Environment effects statement?

**Dr RATNAM:** Yes.

**Mr WURT:** Out of that statement the recommendations were for filtration, but it was overwritten. Even the EPA came out and did not recommend it. Our suspicion was that—I mean, our hope was—if we got filtration on those vent stacks, it would have set the precedent for any other road projects going forward. MTAG even went to the lengths of contacting the pre-eminent filtration company in the world, which is in Austria. We were having communications with the CEO, and he said for a small amount of money he would be able to put filtration on those vent stacks and remove up to 90 per cent of the harmful pollution coming out of them. So we feel like it is a real lost opportunity. I will say that they have incorporated into the design of the vent stacks that they can be retrofitted later on.

**Dr RATNAM:** Right.

**Mr WURT:** But if you look at examples out of Sydney, for example, when you try and retrofit something it is never as good as actually putting it in in the beginning. There are always compromises. And to be honest,

when it is a private company that is going to be making those calls later on as to whether we might need filtration, it does not give a lot of confidence I suppose to a community that has been impacted by truck pollution for decades.

**Dr RATNAM:** Great, thank you. And anything else you want to elaborate on in terms of some of the things they could do to improve the air quality from that project?

**Mr WURT:** No. Filtration on the vent stacks would be the number one thing to do, and obviously a clean truck program that is also going to reduce the pollution coming out of those trucks. Imagine if we were all driving around in 21-year-old cars—people would be outraged. And we are not, are we? But well over 50 per cent of the trucks are, on our streets.

**Dr RATNAM:** Right. And just a further follow-up question from what you all talked about in terms of attempting to collaborate with government, which is really great to see. It sounds like you all have in good faith attempted to do that and to put some of these solutions on the table. It sounds like there is some movement in some areas, which is really positive. I would be interested in your reflections on what you think the barriers are, because I guess as people who provide oversight in the Parliament, it would be good to know of some of the areas that we can really strengthen our advocacy around in removing some of those barriers. So do you have a sense of: is it funding, is it resources in those key agencies, or what is it—or a range of things?

**Ms TOOP:** I reckon funding and resources is a key.

**Dr RATNAM:** Yes.

**Ms TOOP:** Just adding to the issue that Martin raised, one of the key findings of the group was that there needed to be an increase in monitoring stations around the inner west in particular, because obviously monitoring is required to understand where the problems are in order to target the action. The West Gate Tunnel have their own air monitoring facilities. It was like pulling hen's teeth trying to get them to release that material to the EPA so that they could analyse the pollution impacts of the West Gate Tunnel Project. We finally got that information, and it was alarming. We want the monitoring to persist beyond—and be handed over to the EPA, if you like—the construction of the tunnel. We have received some sort of advice that that is a possibility—I do not know that it is a probability—but certainly the group wants to see an increase in monitoring generally, so that, you know, the EPA are well informed and they can target those areas in terms of their action.

**Dr RATNAM:** Great. And you mentioned, Patricia, funding and resources has been an issue. Do you have a sense of particularly where? Do you know which agencies would benefit from that funding—it could have hastened progress on some of these outcomes?

**Ms TOOP:** Well, I certainly think the environment protection people could do with some increased funding, but when we had the presentation from the various departments to our group there was a sense of, I guess, distress around the fact that a lot of the recommendations could not be actioned because of the cost and because of, you know, the issues that the government has been experiencing in terms of overruns on, for example, the West Gate Tunnel Project et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. So as much as the departments were attempting to work together and provide very good solutions to the issues that had been raised, there seemed to be a poverty of funding available to undertake those activities.

**The CHAIR:** I will come around for another round. So Mr Melhem, another round of questions?

**Mr MELHEM:** Thanks. Well, Patricia, I have been doing some follow-ups since earlier on, and I have been thinking about the response. And I believe, based on the presentation you had a few weeks ago, a letter is coming your way shortly. Hopefully there is some really good news there in relation to some of the areas you discussed in that presentation—the last one you talked about, which is the operational one in relation to the monitoring. I think there is some good news there. I think it is important that that monitoring take place. Also you talked about the Melbourne Market. That is going to take about 28 000 trucks off the road. Hopefully that will be used to host containers—empty ones and full ones as well. And there is a fair bit of progress on the other stuff, including taking trucks off—Martin, you talked about this, I think. I think it is time for us to bite the bullet on basically getting these new technologies put in place and zero emissions. So hopefully we will get some positive actions there. I appreciate that. The letter is coming your way.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. Good news coming soon, it looks like.

**Ms TOOP:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** I might just ask a question, if I can, to you, Caroline. I am interested to hear more about your story and perhaps whether you felt that the interactions with the EPA have been helpful or useful to you. It is interesting that you noted that during the pandemic—because, you know, no-one was working—the smell sort of went away. And that has, I guess, in one sense been able to provide a sharper focus on perhaps what might be happening in your community and in your neighbourhood. Has the EPA—

*Interruption.*

**The CHAIR:** Sorry, I have got chainsaws going in the background there somewhere. I do not know what is happening over there. Lots happening in my neighbourhood at the moment—a house being demolished across the road, chainsaws going. I am so sorry.

But, Caroline, is there anything that the EPA is suggesting as a way forward perhaps for further monitoring of those emissions, or are they working with industry in your neighbourhood to reduce them? What is happening there?

**Ms CITTARELLI:** Well, I do not feel they are, because I have not had a very good response that I feel would help the situation. They always send you a return email about your inquiry, but it does not really fix the problem. They do not go to the source. They do not do the footwork and find out where it is coming from, because these industries are able to keep on going. They have a licence to go on. They should not even be operating. If you are emitting that sort of odour, you should be shut down and cleaned up. You have to use whatever you need to use, buy filters. For heaven's sake, we are in the 21st century.

You cannot manufacture—I do not know what; dog food, chicken—whatever they make over there and produce these toxic smells. It is not fair that we, as a community, put up with that. I do not think the EPA works hard enough to stop that, especially here in the inner west where everything is so smelly all the time. The sources are numerous and everywhere. We need to find these places, to stop them and clean them up. It is not fair. We are living here. Why can't somebody monitor the air pollution of smell? Where is the machine to do that, to say, 'This is toxic. It should not be happening. You need to stop'? Someone needs to do that in our area on a daily basis. I am happy to put a machine at my place to monitor the air that we have in our community, because it seems to be here all the time.

**The CHAIR:** You have lived there for a long time now. Has it changed in intensity? Are the smells different, or has it been a constant thing in your experience?

**Ms CITTARELLI:** The intensity is always changing. Like, sometimes it could be a very low toxic smell, but you might find that they are doing it a little bit less in intensity but it is still there. Do you know what I mean? And it still lasts a long time. I remember especially on Australia Day this year the toxic smell of sewage started at 6.00 am in the morning and did not stop until 11.00 pm that night. That was Australia Day. That was a holiday. I could not do anything in my backyard. I had to leave the house and go to my daughter's place, because it was continuous. I do not know how anyone else could have lived for that whole day here, which was Australia Day, and that is really telling.

**The CHAIR:** You are saying there is a sewage smell, but are there also other types of smells that you are noticing? You talked about a toxic smell.

**Ms CITTARELLI:** To me a sewage smell is toxic, because it is offensive to your whole being. It makes you anxious. You just think, 'Why is this here?'. I say 'toxic'; I cannot say what is in that smell, but it smells like sewage most of the time or all of the time. It could range from, you know, different sorts of sewage. Sometimes it has smelt like something is rotting. Because as a nurse I have attended to people with gangrene—wounds that are totally infected and they are gangrenous, and they have that rotting smell. Sometimes I can smell that, and that is just not acceptable. It is totally unacceptable to be living here in this beautiful state and having this smell. You cannot come home. You are at work, you come home, you are going to cook dinner, and there it is—the smell—and you have to eat with that smell. You close everything; it is still in your house, so you have to put a scented candle on. I mean, this is not the way we are supposed to live. It is 2021. Really? Just

like the trucks, let us get up to where we are supposed to be and spend the money where it is supposed to be spent.

**The CHAIR:** No problem. Thanks so much, Caroline. I really appreciate that. We have got only a few minutes left. Dr Cumming, a question, please.

**Dr CUMMING:** Thank you, Chair, and I must agree with your presentation, Caroline. Footscray used to have that stigma that it smelt. I grew up at the feet of my mother, remembering her ringing up the EPA, yelling at the EPA at my front doorstep as a kid in Footscray. And my mother would always say, 'Your nose knows'.

**Ms CITTARELLI:** Yes.

**Dr CUMMING:** Your nose knows if something is wrong. On that, I have had many a complaint about the smells from Altona, from Brooklyn, from West Sunshine, and in Yarraville now. My question is around when you add rain to pollution—then it turns into toxic soil and toxic water, which we also experience. I am guessing that you—Caroline or Bert or Martin or others—might talk about your backyards and this toxic soil. Obviously, I am guessing, some of the recommendations that you would hope that this inquiry adds would be that especially with the West Gate Tunnel Project, seeing that we are dealing with the toxic soil that has been dug up, we might request filters on those stacks, and that obviously you want a clean truck program, which makes a lot of sense, as well as alternative fuel sources, so we can actually stop it. Because we all know that all smoke is dangerous, all air pollution is dangerous, and let us stop it at the source. So if you would like to add to that if I have missed anything from your presentation, but I would like to hear your experience about the toxic soil and the toxic water that come from our acid rain.

**Mr BOERE:** Okay, can I say something? The EPA actually has an odour expert. Unfortunately odour detection is something that depends on human noses. There is very little in the way of sensors for that sort of thing. It is vested in mainly one person, and they have done demonstrations at Brooklyn meetings. They have a kit they can put out to develop some of these odours. Basically this person has got a calibrated nose. But you need to report to the EPA and tell them it is an odour problem and try and get their odour expert to come out and start tracking these things down. So I hope that helps a bit, at least with where to start.

The other thing is when we are talking about government responses one of the things we need to think about is local government responses, because we actually have a problem down in Altona North—and it is not the only place—and it is to do with firms. They will have their permits, are operating, but they are not now operating within their permits, and the councils actually need to go around and go back and check on whether firms are operating under their permits. That is a problem. You know, they set up, they get their permit, they start operating—hardly ever do the councils go back and check that they are doing the right thing still.

**Ms CITTARELLI:** I agree.

**Mr BOERE:** So that needs to be an ongoing program in some respects. I do not know whether this is true of all councils. There seems to be a feeling of, 'We want to push all this problem'—you know, it is a state government problem and less of a local government problem. But local government has got a part to play in enforcement as well.

**Ms CITTARELLI:** I agree—

**The CHAIR:** Sorry. I am watching the time. We have got about 4 more minutes left. Has anyone got an urgent question or a statement? Martin, you wanted to add something in the last few moments.

**Mr WURT:** I just wanted to build on something. Having lived in the western suburbs for about 28 years now, there definitely seems to be a perception often that comes from government and other parts of Melbourne that you deserve what you get by moving to the western suburbs. I mean, I really feel like there is a bit of a divide. You know, people know there is industry over here, they know the port is over here, and they kind of say, 'What do you expect if you move here?', and my thinking is that we need to change that perception.

**Ms CITTARELLI:** Yes. Correct.

**Mr WURT:** And just because we live in the west here, if I move out of my home, it does not mean the government is going to buy up my house and say, 'No-one should live here because of the truck pollution'.

Someone else will just simply move in. So to kind of say that it is this smaller problem and it is just affecting a small group of Melbourne—and let us face it, it is where you will find most of the low socio-economic areas of Melbourne. It is in the west. I mean, the government could do a lot to change those perceptions, and then politics come into play as well. To be honest, most of them are safe Labor seats. We are never going to get pork-barrelled out here at election time saying, ‘Hey, yeah, we’re going to do this for you’. That is my final statement, I suppose.

**Ms CITTARELLI:** I agree.

**Ms SHEPPARD:** Could I also add something? We have spoken about vehicle emissions standards for trucks, but really we need some more incentives for zero-emissions vehicles, including hydrogen-powered trucks, hydrogen-powered passenger vehicles and electric passenger vehicles. At the moment there is only one place in Victoria where you can fill a hydrogen-fuelled vehicle, and that is at Toyota in Altona. You cannot buy a hydrogen-fuelled car here—I tried—and there are no electric vehicle charging points in the City of Maribyrnong. There is only one in Altona and I believe one in Moonee Valley, so there is no public electric vehicle charging infrastructure, and in fact the state government has put some disincentives in place for us to reduce the uptake of electric vehicles for passenger use. So these are things that the government could be proactively working on to improve emissions from traffic by reducing the emissions at the source. And traffic is repeatedly referred to by the EPA as a dispersed source. It is very difficult to monitor and control and eliminate because the vehicles are moving.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Clare. The government has just announced a whole bunch of initiatives in the zero-emissions vehicle area, and I know there is a common myth that we are acting to put disincentives in place. It is actually not true, because the charge that we have put in place is actually cheaper than the fuel excise on combustible vehicles, and all of that charge that is collected will go into building infrastructure for charging points and the like. And so there is an incentive there for people as well to drive their cars less, so getting people into active transport or catching public transport more. I know there is a bit of disagreement about it, so we are not going to get into that debate today, but I think it is important just to correct the record that there is a common misconception around that.

Look, we have run out of time. It is a quarter past one. I would just like to thank you all very much for your contributions today and the work and the effort that you have put into explaining the issues that affect you there in the western suburbs. You are to be commended for your presentation and your evidence today, and I would just like to thank you all very much for your attendance.

**Witnesses withdrew.**