

27 February 2013.

The Standing Committee
on Community Affairs,
Federal Parliament,
Canberra 2600.



Health and Air Quality

Up till about a year ago we lived in the Upper Hunter Valley, and had done so for the preceding twenty years. Our property was west of Muswellbrook, north west of the mines and power stations towards Singleton and south east of the mines at Ulan. Both directions from whence the prevailing winds and weather in our previous abode emanated from. We were regularly subjected to mine dust in our air, our drinking water and on our garden produce. Over the years the air pollution became ever more obvious over Muswellbrook and clear starry nights became a memory.

About five or six years ago we had tests undertaken that showed we had accumulated high levels of toxic elements in our bodies. The National Pollution Index indicated these were coming from mine dust, diesel combustion, mining explosives and discharge from the power stations.

We conveyed our concerns to our local state and federal parliamentarians. Both responded and the state member passed our correspondence to the local area health service to deal with. Their toxicity expert responded in person but would not give an assurance that our environment was safe. No offer was made to undertake further tests to check the original readings. It had been our belief, up till then, that the government and bureaucracy's roles were to serve the

community's needs. How mistaken we were!

Since then a number of air monitors have been installed in various locations in the Upper Hunter but these are funded and monitored by the mining companies. These monitors are a step in the right direction but control should be undertaken by an independent and transparent organisation. If the government is serious about the health of residents living in areas adjacent to mining leases then the monitoring should include the finer particles, which are capable of entering the blood through the lungs and an ^{an}alysis of the elements in the dust.

It is our belief that parliamentarians are elected as agents of the people and the government's prime role is to ensure that the safety and security of the people, the community and the environment is upheld. To this end any mining approval should include a payment by the company, outside the royalty payment arrangement, to cover independent monitoring, testing and inspection of air quality as well as water, noise and other adverse impacts affecting those unfortunate enough to live adjoining or in affected environs.

Human health effects from mining dust usually takes considerable time to manifest and by then mines have often been exhausted, the market collapsed or the companies moved on. To cover the cost of inherited long-term health and environmental problems mining companies should pay a levy per tonne of material moved, not resource extracted, to be set aside in a dedicated fund to pay for the inevitable consequences.

Douglas Blackwell.