

I am a private citizen and involved in a number of community groups engaged in advocating for strong actions on protecting our environment and in particular the sustainability of our community. I have worked in quality improvement positions in a major Victorian Hospital and in Public Health research. I believe it is crucial that Victoria adopts a wholistic approach to protecting our environment, adopting Triple Bottom Line accounting practices to ensure that societal/health and environmental factors are properly balanced against any proposed economic activity. As noted in the Clear Air for All Victorians Air Quality Statement, health is a critical factor for air quality being the reason we do much of the work to ensure clean air. There is much that the EPA can learn from how our Health Services evaluate their practices, benchmark themselves, and identify opportunities to improve their practices.

The most cost effective way to improve the air quality of Victoria is to ensure that the EPA has a best practice evaluation and quality improvement system in place. This would mean that the EPA is actively and routinely reviewing against international benchmark comparators both its monitoring systems and identifying pollution reduction strategies to improve the air quality of Victoria. This will ensure that Victoria is well placed to identify further steps in its journey to clean air for all Victorians, particularly those most vulnerable to the effects of poor air quality.

An EPA empowered to identify known and emerging risks, advocating to the government and community innovative and best practice strategies to address these risks will be positioned to effectively improve air quality.

A state wide emissions inventory of pollutants must be a high priority . Benchmarking our air quality against international best practice standards and targets is essential.

Renewing and expanding the air quality monitoring network is critical to providing good data on which to make decisions on the steps needed to provide the highest quality air to Victorians. Likewise modelling air quality, eg factoring in distances between known sources of pollution and monitoring equipment and homes is critical, but can only be built on a foundation of a comprehensive air quality monitoring network.

It is critical (and cost effective) that the EPA work to reduce the occurrence of air pollution, and one of the biggest contributors of air pollution in Victoria is transport. It is important that the EPA utilise the planning system to decrease the dependence of communities on motor vehicles, especially private motor vehicles. This should be via advocacy for; walkable neighbourhoods, the provision of sufficiently capacious, frequent and integrated public transport, and active transport infrastructure. The additional health benefits of active transport must be factored in when balancing costs and benefits of transport choices, as must the health costs of road-based pollution contributions. It is vital that the health effects of air quality are incorporated into all decisions involving transport planning.

It is important that the EPA recognises and preserves the air quality “services” of vegetation and trees along road corridors. This particulate filtration and humidification, (not to mention noise buffering, shading/cooling and light pollution deflection and water quality factors) is critical to the communities that live in close proximity to major roads. Factors such as the local amount of green space should be taken into consideration when communities are disadvantaged in order not to disadvantage them further. The EPA must act to ensure the preservation of such green infrastructure, recognising that when fully grown trees are removed it is many many years before replacement vegetation will grow, and thus communities are deprived of these air quality services for those many years.

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