



# SAFEGUARDING OUR HEALTH A CLEAN AIR ACT FOR AUSTRALIA

*The Greens plan for improving air quality in Australia*

It's time we took the air we breathe more seriously. Industries continue to pump dangerous emissions into our atmosphere that have huge health costs. The Greens will deliver a Clean Air Act to cut down on toxic emissions and help keep our most precious resource clean and healthy.

In recent years new evidence has emerged about the risks of air pollution to human health, particularly about the dangers of small particles that can penetrate deep into the lungs. Australia's regulations are lagging behind, putting our health at risk. It's time for the Federal parliament to show some leadership on this issue and deliver the emissions controls Australians deserve.

Year after year of reviews, studies and scoping papers, and the Federal Government still has not moved to protect people from the toxic emissions from a variety of sources - coal dust and coal smoke, off-road petrol engines and many other sources.

Only Federal legislation can deliver the reforms necessary to cut back the cardio-vascular diseases caused by dust from coal mines, burning coal in our power stations and petrol in our gardens. It's time for action on air quality, and we need a Clean Air Act to deliver the smart reforms.

## > THE CLEAN AIR ACT

The Greens will deliver a national Clean Air Act to deliver a suite of targeted measures to improve the air quality in Australia.

The Clean Air Act will:

- **Establish national standards and regulations for air quality, starting with better regulation of particulates from coal mines and coal-fired power stations;**
- **Drive the installation of an air quality monitoring network capable of providing real-time data on pollution sources;**
- **Require coal trains that pass through population centres to be covered; and**
- **Phase in regulations of other sources of polluting emissions**

## > NATIONAL AIR QUALITY STANDARDS

There is nothing more important than clean air, clean water and uncontaminated soil. Yet there are communities in Australia who do not enjoy the basic right of breathing in clean air. The United States has had a Clean Air Act since 1970 which has driven reductions in pollution and protecting people's health.

The recent Senate Inquiry into impacts of air quality on human health heard from communities around Australia concerned for their health from coal mines, coal port and coal-fired power stations. The Committee heard evidence that "The science is clear that coaldust is a killer if you are exposed to it too much, so the simple thing is to remove that risk as much as possible."<sup>i</sup>

Australia has no national standards or consistent means of regulating air quality standards to reduce pollution and protect health. Instead there is a patch-work of different standards and regulatory approaches across the states, including self-regulatory regimes that are clearly failing. The National Plan for Clean Air, currently being developed at COAG, has dragged on for years and shows no sign of coming to a strong consensus on tough standards to protect health or the environment.

The Greens' Clean Air Act will facilitate the development of national standards and regulations for air quality. The Act will prioritise regulation of coal dust in coal affected communities, including requiring coal trains to be covered, and non-road petrol engines.

## > REDUCING THE HARMS OF COAL

The Greens' recent Senate inquiry heard evidence about the impacts of coal mines and coal dust on the communities near the mines and in the corridors where coal is transported. The



inquiry recommended several measures to reduce the harms caused by coal dust pollution including:

- A setback from all coal mines to keep homes at a safe distance.
- Health impact assessments for new developments, so the impact on the health of residents is properly taken into account when issuing approvals.
- Covering trains that transport coal through populated areas. Many residents gave evidence of the huge amounts of dust that accumulate in neighbourhoods close to coal trains and the impact this had on their family's health.

These are inexpensive but effective measures to cut down on harmful particles that threaten the health of thousands of people in Australian cities. The Greens support these recommendations and would implement them through the Clean Air Act and other initiatives.

## > AIR QUALITY MONITORING NETWORK

International research clearly indicates serious health impacts for communities living near coal mines and coal burning power stations; however the national regulations direct the States and Territories to monitor ambient air quality away from sources of air pollution.<sup>ii</sup> While this is valuable information, the existing network tells only half the story.

The National Pollutant Inventory requires reporting from pollution sources, but only to release total annual emissions. We need greater transparency and timeliness in the data around pollution emissions to hold polluters accountable and to help drive mitigation efforts.

Submissions to the 2013 Senate Inquiry into the impacts of air quality on human health made clear the fact that many people living near pollution sources simply do not have enough information about what industry is pumping into the air they are breathing. The NSW Environment Protection Agency has recently identified emissions data analysis by the Newcastle coal industry so compromised that community groups have been forced to run their own monitoring.

With the expansion of coal seam gas extraction, active mining operations are appearing in greater numbers and closer to populations than ever before. The public has a right to know what pollution is being dumped into our air by dirty mining and energy companies; and we have a right to know in a timely fashion.

The Greens will work with state Environmental Protection Authorities and those corporations currently subject to National Pollutant Inventory reporting, to develop the industry-funded installation and operation of a broad coverage air monitoring network around pollution hotspots, like the Hunter and La Trobe Valleys. This information will be made available online in

real time for people to access timely and accurate information about the air they are breathing. Finally, accurate data – not averaged over time or population, but actual levels in affected communities – will be available.

## > NON-ROAD ENGINE EMISSIONS

Australians buy around 1 million unregulated non-road petrol engines every year. Non-road engines such as those used in gardening equipment, lawn mowers and outboard motors, have been shown to contribute significantly to urban air pollution. These unregulated engines produce nitrogen oxides, volatile organic compounds, carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide and particulate matter; and they often do it at a mere arm's length from the operator.

After years of studies, reviews and consultation, there is broad agreement within industry that new standards must be introduced. However the Government still delays on action to protect Australians from these toxic emissions. Australian standards are now lagging so far behind the rest of the world that international manufacturers are effectively dumping engines in Australia that cannot be sold in other countries.

The Greens will move swiftly to introduce emission standards that mirror the current US EPA standards. Given the nature of international trade in these engines, it is highly desirable that introduced regulations are consistent with those in force in the larger global markets for this equipment, and the US EPA is the current standard.

These minimum standards will be supported by a labelling scheme to drive more informed purchasing of lower emissions technologies.

A full range of clean, low emission engines are already being sold in Australia, with a market share of about 50%. There is no new technology to be developed, nothing new to import, no one new to train. These regulations will simply work to remove the worst polluters from the dirtier end of the market.

In 2008, the Federal government estimated these regulations could result in cost savings of up to \$2.8 Billion over 20 years.<sup>iii</sup>

## > CLEANER HEATERS FOR CLEANER AIR

Despite solid evidence that woodsmoke can have significant impacts on human health, the regulations around wood heaters have not been updated to keep pace with heater technology. The health impacts from woodheater emissions are conservatively estimated at \$190 million per annum.<sup>iv</sup>

The Clean Air Act will impose tighter emissions standards on **new** heaters and provide the necessary support to make them effective.



The Clean Air Act will mandate an emissions standard of 1g/kg of burnt fuel and 65% efficiency for all new woodheaters manufactured in or imported to Australia. This standard will be supported by the introduction of a Commonwealth certification and audit process to make sure wood heaters are performing as well as they need to be.

The federal government recently estimated that these regulations could result in cost savings of up to \$1.7 Billion over 20 years.<sup>v</sup>

## > A COMPREHENSIVE SOLUTION

The Clean Air Act contains measures that will make a real difference to air quality for many Australians. But there are no safe levels of exposure to the ultrafine particles that can penetrate deepest into our lungs. That is why the Greens would move as rapidly as possible to achieve nationwide, enforceable standards around particulate pollution.

The Greens care about health and we believe that our wellbeing should not take a back seat to commercial interests. All mining developments should first undergo a rigorous health impact assessment to estimate the consequences it would have on the health of the community.

These measures put health first where it belongs. Australians should be able to breathe easy, knowing that it is safe to breathe the air in their homes.

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<sup>i</sup> [Senate Community Affairs Committee, Impacts on Health of Air Quality in Australia, 2013](#)

<sup>ii</sup> [National Environmental Protection Measure on Ambient Air Quality](#)

<sup>iii</sup> DEWHA, Cost Benefit Analysis of Options to Manage Emissions from Selected Non-Road Engines, August 2008

<sup>iv</sup> EPHC, National Approach to Reducing Woodheater Emissions Scoping Paper on Regulatory Options 17/8.1/A

<sup>v</sup> [National Environment Protection Council, Regulatory Impact Statement for Reducing Emissions from Woodheaters, April 2013](#)