

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
Question On Notice

Thursday, 18 June 2020

2988. Hon Robin Chapple to the Parliamentary Secretary representing the Minister for Health

I refer to the Port Hedland dust issue, the Port Hedland buy-back scheme, and the Port Hedland Dust Taskforce headed by the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (DWER), and I ask:

- (a) given DWER have stated that the "air [quality] guideline value is not an enforceable limit", could the Minister explain facets of air quality that are enforceable, from a public health perspective;
- (b) from a health perspective, do current levels of airborne dust pose any risk to life-long residents who decide to stay in the West End of Port Hedland;
- (c) given various extant histopathological reports from Port Hedland make reference to macrophage aggregation, and distinguishing dark granular inclusions in macrophagic cytoplasm, does the Minister concede that airborne particulate metals, as a result of industry, are a genuine health concern for the residents of Port Hedland; and
- (d) for the purpose of public health, does the Minister concede that the levels of airborne dust at Port Hedland are higher than other settlements in the Pilbara as a result of various local industries?

Answer

I am advised:

- (a) In relation to Port Hedland air quality, the Department of Health's (DOH) role is to provide health advice to relevant agencies. DOH has recommended that ambient (outside) air quality guidelines be met in residential areas of Port Hedland. The guidelines are indicators to manage population exposure and should not be confused with an exposure limit.

I am advised by the Minister for Environment that the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (DWER) regulates dust emissions from port facilities in Port Hedland. The port facilities hold a licence issued under the *Environmental Protection Act 1986* which include a range of enforceable conditions relating to dust emissions. DOH regularly provides health advice to DWER to inform its regulation of these facilities.

- (b) The State Government has acknowledged an increased risk to people living in the West End of Port Hedland. The Government is implementing the Port Hedland dust taskforce recommendations in response to that risk.

- (c) The DOH Health Risk Assessment for Port Hedland demonstrated that metals in the air do not exceed health-based guidelines developed to protect sensitive people.

(d) The State Government has acknowledged the elevated levels of dust in the West End of Port Hedland. Arid areas in Australia including the Pilbara are prone to higher levels of dust by the nature of the environmental conditions. In settlements where there is also dust emitting industry located within close proximity there is generally expected to be higher levels of dust.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized, cursive 'P' followed by a series of loops and a final downward stroke.