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Contact: Mark Hanemann (02) 9995 6845

Ms Helen Orchard
Hon Secretary
Koolewong and Point Clare – Tascott Progress Association
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Dear Ms Orchard

I refer to your letter to the Minister for Health, the Hon Jillian Skinner MP, regarding various issues relating to the Northern Rail Freight Line. Your letter was referred to the Minister for the Environment, the Hon Robyn Parker MP, and I have been asked to reply.

The Environment Protection Authority (EPA) considers rail noise, including wheel squeal to be a serious matter and acknowledges that it can impact people living near rail lines.

As you may be aware, the EPA regulates rail activities in the Sydney metropolitan area through environment protection licence 12208 issued to Sydney Trains. The licence sets noise criteria for new and substantially modified locomotives being introduced to the rail network. Any locomotive that does not meet the specified noise criteria is not approved for use in NSW. The EPA recently refused approval for approximately fifty locomotives to operate on the NSW rail network because these did not meet the noise limits in the licence. It is important to note that locomotives that were operating on the NSW rail network before the noise criteria came into force in the 1980s are not required to meet noise criteria. However, the EPA is working towards having all locomotives that operate on the NSW network meet relevant noise criteria.

The EPA has required Sydney Trains to undertake several pollution reduction programs (PRPs) to address wheel squeal. One PRP required Sydney Trains to undertake Angle of Attack (AoA) monitoring at Beecroft to identify trains at high risk of causing wheel squeal. This PRP resulted in the rectification of over four hundred defective wagons, providing benefits throughout the state. The monitoring at Beecroft is ongoing and will provide valuable data to help mitigate the impacts of wheel squeal.

A second PRP required Sydney Trains to install thirty Top of Rail Friction Modifier Applicator (TORFMA) units at identified wheel squeal hotspots throughout the metropolitan area. A TORFMA unit is designed to release a small amount of lubricant onto the top of the rail when a locomotive is approaching. The locomotive spreads the lubricant along the rail and this assists in reducing wheel squeal. Six TORFMA units have been installed in the Koolewong area and two in the Tascott area.

Since July 2012 the EPA has imposed a third wheel squeal PRP on Sydney Trains. The intent of the current program is to identify any rail freight wagons that have the potential to cause wheel squeal and to provide an opportunity for private rail freight operators to rectify any identified faults. Under the new PRP, private rail freight operators must submit a quarterly report to Sydney Trains detailing any maintenance or rectification works undertaken on wagons to address problems identified by the monitoring. Sydney Trains then provides Quarterly Updates to the EPA for assessment.

Results to date have been positive. The Quarterly Updates received by the EPA identify a range of actions being undertaken by rail operators that have recorded AoA exceedances. These include inspecting wagons to ensure compliance with mechanical specifications, servicing of identified wagons found to be outside specifications, monitoring those wagons that reoffend and the monitoring and review of wagon classes as a whole to improve their performance.

The EPA is currently reviewing the scope of the AoA PRP to improve the consistency of responses from private rail operators. You can view the PRP on Sydney Trains' environment protection licence on the EPA's public register at www.epa.nsw.gov.au/prpoeoapp/. All of these programs are designed and put in place with the state-wide benefit or application to freight train noise improvements specifically in mind.

I also understand that there are significant community concerns relating to potential coal dust emissions from trains. The EPA bases its regulatory decisions on the best scientifically valid information available. To that end, the EPA required the Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC) to undertake a study on whether loaded coal trains contributed more dust to the atmosphere than other types of trains.

A report on the study was released by ARTC earlier this year, however problems were identified with the statistics of this report. To address this concern the EPA sought advice from the Office of the Chief Scientist and Engineer and subsequently engaged statistical expert Professor Louise Ryan to undertake a thorough independent review of the statistical analyses used in the ARTC report. Professor Ryan's review, which has been published on the EPA website, found that there were some serious limitations with the statistical analyses in the ARTC report.

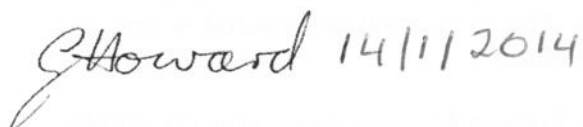
Professor Ryan is being further engaged by the EPA to undertake a re-analysis of the data. Once this is complete the results will again be made available to the public. The EPA will use this information to make an informed consideration of any further action that may be required to manage coal dust from loaded coal trains.

In relation to your concerns regarding the new rail telecommunication structures I can advise that the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency (ARPNSA) regulates electromagnetic radiation. More information is available on ARPNSA's website at www.arpnsa.gov.au or by phoning 1800 022 333.

I trust this information is of assistance.

If you have any further questions with regard to rail noise, please contact the EPA's Mark Hanemann, A/Unit Head Infrastructure on 9995 6845 or by email at mark.hanemann@epa.nsw.gov.au.

Yours sincerely



GISELLE HOWARD
Director Metropolitan
Environment Protection Authority