

## Climate Health WA Inquiry

### About your submission

Are you responding on behalf of an organisation or group?

No

Yes

If yes, please identify the organisation:

### Your contact details

The following information will not be published without your permission but enables the Inquiry to contact you about your submission if required.

First name Stephen

Surname Bennetts

Address

Phone

Email

### Publication of submissions

Submissions will be published with the name of the submitter unless otherwise indicated below. Do you consent to be identified in the published submission?

Yes, I / my organisation agree to be identified

No, I / my organisation request to remain anonymous

### Terms of Reference

You are encouraged to address at least ONE of the Terms of Reference as listed below. Please select which item/s you will address:

1. Establish current knowledge on the implications of climate change for health in Western Australia (WA) and recommend a framework for evaluating future implications.

2. Identify and recommend a program of work to manage the implications of climate change for health in WA, which will protect the public from the harmful health impacts of climate change.

3. Identify and recommend a program of work to manage the implications of climate change for health in WA, which will strengthen the preparedness and resilience of communities and health services against extreme weather events, with a focus on the most vulnerable in the community.

- 4. Identify and recommend a program of work to manage the implications of climate change for health in WA, which will reduce the contribution of WA health services to climate change and other detrimental impacts.
- 5. Identify and recommend a program of work to manage the implications of climate change for health in WA, which will enable WA Health services to implement change, including energy efficiency, to a more sustainable model.
- 6. Evaluate the likely benefits (health and wellbeing, social and economic) arising from climate change mitigation strategies, with a focus on WA health services.
- 7. Define the role of the Department of Health in leading public policy on climate change and health.
- 8. Recommend the Terms of Reference, scope and preferred methods for undertaking a climate change vulnerability assessment for the health sector.
- 9. Recommend the Terms of Reference, scope and preferred methods for developing a Climate Change Adaptation Plan for the health sector.

#### **Submissions response field**

**Please type your response to the item(s) selected above into the field below. Alternatively you may provide your submission as a separate attachment (suggested maximum 5 pages).**

Submission provided as a separate attachment.

#### **Attachments**

**The following documents were provided as attachments to the submission**

- Black, J.L. & Box, I. (2018). Review of Yara Pilbara Nitrates Pty Ltd Commissioning Report (September 2017) for the Technical Ammonium Nitrate Plant in Relation to Human Health.
- O'Connor, K. Untitled article from the ABC North West.
- Legislative Council C218 Question without notice: 15 June 2017. Hon Robin Chappie to the Minister for Environment.

**Please complete this sheet and submit with any attachments to: Climate Health WA Inquiry**

## **SUBMISSION TO CLIMATE HEALTH WA INQUIRY**

**BY DR STEPHEN BENNETTS**

I welcome this opportunity to make a submission to the Climate Health WA inquiry.

My interest in this topic arises from my involvement since 2006 in the organisation Friends of Australian Rock Art Inc. (WA), which is also making a separate submission to this inquiry.

FARA's main focus of course has been the protection of the globally significant rock art of the Burrup Peninsula, which according to recent scientific analysis by Professor John Black, is being degraded by extremely high (and it would seem largely unregulated) levels of industrial emissions from the extensive Burrup industrial infrastructure which successive State Governments have seen fit to locate in the middle of the world's oldest and largest outdoor rock art gallery.

For instance, recent evaluation by Professor John Black of emissions from the Yara nitric acid stack has shown extremely high levels of nitrogen oxide emissions on the Burrup. He earlier also exposed the unreliability of the previous CSIRO emissions monitoring regime, and this led in 2016 to a Senate Inquiry into the whole issue:

[https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Environment\\_and\\_Communications/BurrupPeninsula/Report](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Environment_and_Communications/BurrupPeninsula/Report).

But apart from threats to the Burrup's globally significant rock art, it seems to me that there is also an important public health issue at stake here too, given the close proximity of Karratha and Dampier residents and the large number of people who work within the Burrup industrial area. It is noteworthy that the State Secretary of the CFMEU, Mr Mick Buchan, recently raised concerns about threats to the health of workers from similarly vast and unregulated industrial emissions at Chevron's Gorgon facilities further to the south:

<https://www.smh.com.au/national/chevron-is-venting-toxic-chemicals-in-north-west-wa-documents-reveal-20190417-p51f5c.html>

Similar concerns were heightened for me and FARA colleagues when we became aware of former WA Premier Colin Barnett's 2016 statement that the site of a proposed Murujuga cultural centre at Hearson's Cove on the Burrup Peninsula was no longer viable, because

visitors would be exposed to dangerously high levels of industrial emissions. As Mr Barnett stated in a letter to Robin Chapple MLC,

*The rationale for wishing to see the MLKC [visitor centre] moved away from Hearson Cove is primarily one of public health...The proposed Hearson Cove site is located within 1.5 kilometres of the Yara Nitrates Technical Ammonium Nitrate plant and the Yara Pilbara Fertilisers ammonia plant. Preliminary discussions with relevant State agencies have indicated that the development of the [Centre] at Hearson Cove could present an unacceptable risk to public health and safety.<sup>1</sup>*

It is not clear to us what kind of ‘preliminary discussions with relevant State agencies’ Mr Barnett is referring to, or the nature of the information alluded to, but I would certainly urge the Minister to pursue such inquiries as a matter of urgency, so that reliable scientific information on the relevant health risks can be made publicly available.

A dramatic example of the high level of Burrup industrial emissions being released regularly in close proximity to workers on the Burrup is the Woodside gas flare pictured below, which according to a parliamentary statement by the Minister for the Environment in 2018, discharged approximately 270 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e on just a single day (2 August 2018).<sup>2</sup> The effect of associated heavy acid rain deposits on the brickwork of the nearby Woodside Visitor Centre is also dramatically visible in the 2016 photograph reproduced below.

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from Premier Colin Barnett to Robin Chapple MLC 15 November 2016 (copy provided to FARA)

<sup>2</sup> Reply by Minister for Environment to Legislative Council QON 1450 of 14 August 2018 by Hon Robin Chapple



*Woodside gas flare, Burrup Peninsula, 2 August 2018*

**Woodside Visitors**  
centre

Approximately 100 mm gap between roof lines

Dark colour: microbial growth stimulated by nitrogen compounds

Erosion of concrete paving stones where acid rain falls

**Effects of industrial emissions through acid rain on Burrup Peninsula**

*Woodside Visitors Centre, Burrup Peninsula, June 2016*

Given our public health concerns, FARA in 2018 commissioned a report from Adelaide Exposure Science and Health on the possible health effects of such high-level Burrup emissions on workers and Dampier and Karratha residents:

<https://www.fara.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Human-health-report-9Feb18.pdf>

As you will see, the report found that there was a possibility that the pollutants being released

*would result in severe health outcomes for people exposed, particularly for people with asthmatic or other respiratory conditions. Due to the nature of these inorganic pollutants, the consequences of such high-level exposure are severe and should not be underestimated by industry or government.*

This report should also be read in conjunction with Dr Black and Dr Ilona Box's March 2018 'Review of Yara Pilbara Nitrates Pty Ltd Commissioning Report (September 2017) for the Technical Ammonium Nitrate Plant in Relation to Human Health' (attached).

One former Karratha resident has described to me a so-called 'Karratha syndrome' said to affect the health of residents, producing lethargy and respiratory symptoms. In an effort to substantiate these claims, I have in fact forwarded the two reports mentioned to three local medical practitioners for comment. However, given the evidence presented here, it is clear that more systematic investigation by appropriately qualified health science professionals needs to be undertaken as a matter of urgency, to determine the health risks to which human populations in the Burrup, Karratha and Dampier areas are currently being exposed to.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Stephen Bennetts

Consultant anthropologist

Fellow, Australian Anthropological Society

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30 August 2019