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Delta's Response to Activist Claims

Alarmist Claims of Power Station Health Impacts Dismissed by Peer Review

The Australian Energy Council has investigated unsubstantiated claims about the health effects of coal-fired power stations in New South Wales. These claims continue to emerge despite a lack of supporting data and independent peer-reviewed assessment.

The claims seek to link NSW power stations to the incidence of asthma and early deaths. The claims on premature deaths stem from a non-peer reviewed study – the Ewald Report – which was commissioned in 2019 by a green advocacy group, Environmental Justice Australia.

Many claims from activists regarding NOx health impacts are sourced from the Ewald Report. This was not a peer reviewed scientific report. When subjected to independent peer review it was found to be unreliable in many respects.

The Australian Energy Council commissioned Environmental Risk Sciences (EnRiskS), an independent qualified consultant, to peer-review the Ewald report. It found the report used “zawed analysis” that was “not based on good science” to try and link yve NSW power stations to premature, yet unveriyed, deaths.

The EnRiskS review summarises that the Ewald report is “poorly referenced, with many sections providing statements with no references as to the basis of such statements. The Ewald report is not suficiently transparent, hence the detailed calculations undertaken cannot be checked and veriyed. This is especially important where the conclusions of the report make claims regarding speciyc sources being directly attributable/responsible for mortality.”

Overall EnRiskS found that its “review of the Ewald report has identiyed a range of issues that call into question the outcomes presented as well as the level of certainty placed on the outcomes presented.”

Elsewhere it comments that: “It is important to note that the Ewald report consistently makes statements that the assumptions and approach adopted are ‘certain’. This is not the case. The approach adopted has a very high level of uncertainty, which is not recognised or considered in the report.”

Air pollution from a range of sources has the potential to impact on public health. But investigations and assessments of potential health risks from air emissions should be undertaken through independent, peer-reviewed studies which present a complete picture of the overall

health risk from a range of sources.

Delta publishes its emissions data every month. It provides a licence return to the EPA and National Pollution Inventory data annually. Any inference that there is a lack of transparency is without foundation.

Genuine scientific reports on the topic, from reputable independent sources, are readily available. The Inter-Regional Transport of Air Pollutants Study was conducted by the CSIRO in 2002 and journal, The mortality effect of PM2.5 sources in the Greater Metropolitan Region of Sydney, Australia published by Environment International.

The fact is that the Australian population enjoys remarkably clean air by world standards.

Emissions in Australia are monitored by science-based regulators. Any regulation of air quality then needs to be based on robust, peer-reviewed scientific data and assessments. The EnRiskS report is an important reminder of the need to undertake such thorough assessments. The work also helps to highlight the way in which data can be manipulated or misrepresented to pursue an agenda.