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WMW
WESTERN MINE WORKERS'
ALLIANCE



DUST EMISSIONS IN NEWMAN

SUBMISSION TO THE PART V LICENCE REVIEWS FOR BHP'S MOUNT
WHALEBACK AND EASTERN RIDGE

ON BEHALF OF:

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WMWA BACKGROUND

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission on the Licence Review for BHP's Mount Whaleback and Eastern Ridge Part V licences.

The Western Mineworkers Alliance (WMWA) was established in 2013 bringing together Australia's two largest mining unions, the Australian Workers' Union, and the Mining and Energy Union. The Alliance and its partner unions play a vital role in campaigning to improve the working lives of the workers employed by some of the world's largest iron ore miners including Rio Tinto and BHP in their Pilbara operations.

WMWA covers workers in roles including Mining Production Workers, Plant Operators, Equipment Maintainers, Supervisory Staff, Drillers, Shot Firers, Trades and Apprentices, Emergency Services Officers, Engineers and Laboratory Technicians,

The AWU in Western Australia covers workers associated with iron ore, gold, nickel, lithium and diamonds, and workers engaged in connection with the mining industry, such as mine site village caterers, cleaners, housekeepers and maintenance.

The Mining and Energy Union in Western Australia covers workers in coal mining and coal power generation as well as iron ore locomotive drivers and crane operators.



DUST EMISSIONS IN NEWMAN AFFECT THE LIVES OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Newman has the unfortunate title of Australia's second-most dusty city.¹ Many WMWA workers at the sites for this licence review live in Newman and surrounding Pilbara communities. Newman is just five kilometres away from Mount Whaleback. Their lives are directly affected by the conditions set by the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation for the BHP sites. These workers are not anti-mining or anti-development – all depend on mining for their living, and contribute to sustaining the local economy. All industry has some impact on the local environment – the problem is how these impacts are managed. However, it is clear that dust emissions are at levels which seriously impact the health, wellbeing and lifestyles of community members.



The WMWA undertook a public survey of community sentiments about dust emissions in Newman. The survey was published through the WMWA Facebook page, members' group, and local community groups, as well as sent directly to WMWA members living in the community. 84 people responded, all of whom are either current or former Newman residents, or FIFO workers who spend a significant amount of time in the community. Importantly, the survey's results represent a broad community view, with responses from workers in the WMWA and its partner unions, as well as other members of the community such as teachers and nurses.

80% of respondents stated that dust in Newman has impacted their life. For those who said the dust impacted their lives, the effects were many and varied:

- **82%** said that they had experienced health impacts
- **74%** said they had experienced damage to property from dust.
- **40%** said that they had experienced lifestyle impacts (not being able to do what they would otherwise like to do, due to dust)
- **19%** said that they had experienced community safety impacts

1. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-11-08/pilbara-mining-town-residents-call-for-dust-health-screenings/12859126>

Of these responses, the health impacts highlighted are the most concerning. Community members identified a range of illnesses linked to dust emissions:

- Hayfever and allergies
- Blood noses
- Asthma
- Sinus infections
- Bronchitis and difficulty breathing
- Coughing up phlegm

Respondents noticed that these conditions almost immediately disappeared when they left town. These issues are compounded by the difficulty of providing and accessing quality health services in remote towns like Newman. The Indigenous residents of Newman, already facing a higher level of health risk, are among those most impacted. Many respondents are concerned about the long-term health effects of constant dust exposure:

I have a constant cough except when I'm out of town for more than a week.

My family is often sick with lingering illnesses that take much longer to heal from. My family also has ongoing rashes that aren't explained. My family has asthma that is difficult to control.

Since living in Newman I have constant hay fever. I need to take medication year round to cope with this.

... the dust affects my throat and skin. Every morning when I wake up it feels like I have swallowed glass. I do not get this while staying in Perth or anywhere else, just dusty old Newman.

... my asthmatic children have more regular cases due to the dust levels. Personally my nasal congestion is much worse and have regular blood noses due to the dust particles in the air.

There seems to be a lot of Heath issues arising in long term residents. Friends are all complaining of the same things.

The dust in Newman has a huge impact on my family's and also my health, to the point that we have to purchase an Air Purifier for the home to reduce this dust.

Other impacts, while less immediately concerning, have a significant impact on the amenity of lifestyles for community members. As a direct result of BHP's failure to adequately mitigate dust emissions from these two sites, day-to-day activities that would be taken for granted by most Australians – like washing clothes and cars, turning on the AC, or even taking a walk – are a struggle for those living in Newman.

You can wash your car [and] clothes and go outside an hour later and [they] will be covered in dust.

Anything outside is covered and required cleaning almost daily. Kids breathing has gotten worse Can't drive at certain times due to sun and dust. All personal belongings are now worthless due to staining



My car has to be washed a minimum of once a week as the dust builds up that quick that if left too long I only have to rub the surface for the dust to scratch the paintwork.

Eating into paint on cars, damaging, damaged all outdoor furniture and some indoor. All kids outdoor toys and equipment have significant damage. Kills our outdoor plants. Constantly have to wash thick layers of dust off leaves.

Irreversible dust damage to caravan and car. In big wind season the dust is worse and invades the house no matter what measures we take to seal off entry points. Constantly dirty bathroom and surfaces. Sport participation sometimes effected in windy season.

I can't hang my washing on the line unless I clean the clothes line before hanging it out. If there's a blast & my washing is on the line I have to wash it again due to the dust.

No notice about a blast, huge plume of dust rises and falls on town. Dust gets into home, car you just can't escape it.

Can't go walking as the fog like dust covers the town and the dust that falls on the cars and everywhere is constantly covering everything.

Continual cleaning [of] air vents and air conditioner filter replacement, solar panel cleaning [are necessary].

BHP CAN IMPLEMENT DUST MITIGATION MEASURES

Even recognising that dust is an inevitable consequence of iron ore mining, dust in Newman has reached the point where it is becoming intolerable. Several survey respondents who were long-term residents noted that the dust had been noticeably worse since Mount Whaleback became the hub of BHP's iron ore operations in the Pilbara.

The community response to this survey reflects what the Department already knows: BHP's dust emissions under its Newman operations are already significantly exceeding limits set out in its licences. In 2018-19, BHP exceeded its licence limits on dust emissions no less than 45 times. More concerningly, BHP's reports on their own environmental compliance are not made public, requiring whistleblowers to publish this alarming figure. ²

BHP, while it has not publicly acknowledged the scale of dust issues from these sites, recognises the need to improve dust mitigation. In 2020, it committed to investing \$300 million over 5 years to improve air quality and reduce dust emissions, primarily from Port Hedland.

The two sites for this licence review must be a part of this investment. Environmental conditions applied by Department of Water and Environmental Regulation must be tightened and enforced. And with a 'massive' \$US17 billion underlying profit earned in 2020-21, and \$US15.2 billion paid to shareholders in dividends, BHP can afford to ensure that those living near the site can have some semblance of quality of life.

The WMWA recommends the following further measures are implemented to assess and mitigate the impacts of dust from the two sites:

- **All environmental assessments, studies and reports conducted under BHP's licences should be available for the public to review.** If BHP is complying with its expectations under its licences, it has nothing to worry about; if it is not complying, the community deserves to know.
- **The Department of Water and Environmental Regulation should be properly resourced to investigate and enforce compliance breaches.** Given that BHP is already exceeding its dust limits, any tighter limits will need to be vigorously enforced.
- **Conditions should include local vegetation that mitigate airborne dust.** In Port Hedland, Curtin University and Greening Australia, in partnership with BHP, have begun studying the most effective local plants for easing dust pollution, with rigid branches and needle-like leaves being the most important features in reducing effective dust impacts. ³

The WMWA continues to support its members and the Newman community in ensuring their health and wellbeing. We would welcome any opportunities to provide further information to the licence review and to cooperating with the Department going forward.

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