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Record air quality alerts for the Upper Hunter in 2019 prompt renewed calls for a clean air strategy



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Local News

So far this year there have been **more than 250 air quality alerts in the Upper Hunter**.

This figure comes on top of the **more than 1000 alerts issued in 2019** which was a record for the region.

Drought and bushfires no doubt added to 2019 alerts but as this year's recordings show, even in ideal weather conditions, the PM10 levels, predominantly due to dust from open cut mining operations, continue to exceed national standards.

Given the continued air pollution levels in the Upper Hunter community groups and the NSW Shadow Minister for Environment Kate Washington are calling on the state government to implement a clean air strategy.

A clean air summit was held in 2017 and the state government said it would introduce measures to improve air quality across NSW.

NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) presented a draft proposal to the minister in mid- 2019 but to date it has never been released.

Ms Washington described the NSW Government's decision to reject and delay its own Clean Air Strategy a 'sickening betrayal' which will harm NSW communities suffering through hazardous air pollution.

Meeting this week with impacted residents in Upper Hunter, Ms Washington called on the Environment Minister Matt Kean to stand up to the science-denying members of the Liberal and National party room, particularly the Member for Upper Hunter, Michael Johnsen MP.

"The Government's 'Action Plan' was reportedly put on hold under former Environment Minister Gabrielle Upton, but in March 2020, the Environment Department told a [Budget Estimates](#) hearing that the draft plan had been finalised and was "awaiting Government consideration," she said.

"Despite receiving a copy of the Department's draft Clean Air Strategy in [May 2019](#), Environment Minister Matt Kean took 12 months to decide to reject that plan and [reopen](#) "further consultation on clean air initiatives.

"The NSW Government has abandoned the communities who are choking on hazardous air pollution and crying out for help.

"According to the Government's own figures, families in the Upper Hunter have been suffering through 'hazardous' air pollution more often than once a week, on average. In a seven month period, there were 32 days where air pollution in the Upper Hunter was classified as hazardous to human health. It can't continue. This is third-world stuff, and we know the impact is life and death.

"The Minister's decision to reject and delay the clean air strategy while air pollution is getting much worse is a sickening betrayal."

In response to the Labor Party's claims he has abandoned the clean air strategy Environment Minister Matt Kean said "I continue to intend to issue a clean air strategy.

"The bushfires highlighted the importance of clean air, with NSW experiencing the worst air quality in its history.

"We also saw the impact bad air quality can have on our health and way of life.



Blast at an open cut coal mine near Singleton. Photo Bob Vickers.

"I also want to see what new technologies are available to enable people to maintain their way of life while improving our air quality. This is especially for those communities around the state most impacted by air quality issues, such as in the Hunter.

"We also need to make sure the clean air plan integrates with other government policies, like the electricity strategy.

"To this end, I intend to do further consultation on clean air initiatives, especially regarding bushfire smoke, this year, with a view to publishing the finalised plan early next year."

This story [Calls for the implementation of a clean air strategy](#) first appeared on [The Singleton Argus](#).