



# **Australian Environment Business Network**

## **Submission to the Review of the National Environment Protection NPI NEPM for the National Pollutant Inventory:**

### **Discussion Paper**

November 2000

## **Introduction**

The Australian Environment Business Network (AEBN) is a newly formed industry information and representation service for Australian businesses. The AEBN currently has offices in Melbourne and Sydney working directly with industries from these jurisdictions.

AEBN supports the philosophy behind the NPI and actively encourages industry and government alike to adopt transparent processes when dealing with the community. AEBN is currently working directly with a number of companies in the formation and ongoing support of community liaison groups to better inform the community on industry activity and environmental issues.

AEBN held a briefing on the issues discussed in the Review of the National Environment Protection NPI NEPM for the National Pollutant Inventory Discussion Paper. Over 20 industry representatives attended this briefing from a range of manufacturing industries including representatives from the chemical, food, construction materials automotive and pharmaceutical industries.

The representatives raised serious concerns regarding the National Pollutant Inventory particularly its efficiency and effectiveness.

Particular issues raised in relation to the Review were as follows:

## **Consultation**

AEBN is concerned that the NEPC is not following the provisions of the National Pollutant Inventory and the NEPC Act in conducting this exclusive review. Under the provisions of the NPI a comprehensive review is required to commence by October 2000. The specific consultation processes detailed in the NEPC Act determines the format of the review. The NEPC Act calls for a Public Comment period of not less than two months and for these reviews to be advertised in all jurisdictions. The current process only allowed for a comment period of less than three weeks from when the Discussion Paper was released on the NPI Website. AEBN is not aware of the process being advertised in any daily Newspapers. This is in breach of the NEPC Act. Accordingly, AEBN does not believe this current process satisfies the requirements within the NPI for a comprehensive review.

Consequently, AEBN is concerned by the allocation of resources for a process that fails to meet the legislated obligations for a review of this NEPM. With this in mind AEBN cannot see the outcomes of this current process being more than a minor input to a review process to follow in accordance with the legal requirements of the NEPC Act and the NEPM NPI.

## **Allocation of Resources**

Since its inception the funding arrangements for the NPI has been a constant source of uncertainty for all stakeholders. AEBN supports the establishment and ongoing funding of the NPI to deliver on the original intent - *Community Right To Know*. AEBN is concerned that a lack of certainty regarding funding for the program has, and will continue, to deliver poor data or worse misinform the community by delivering only part of the story.

Throughout the development of the NPI there has been universal acceptance of the need for complete reporting of all sources of both point source environmental emissions and diffuse source of emissions, also called aggregated emissions. Also there has been acceptance for the need to provide contextual information to assist with the interpretation of the data by the community.

AEBN believes it is this funding that limits the scope of the NPI. It is misleading to provide an incomplete and inconsistent level of information across jurisdiction.

***AEBN recommends that the funding arrangements for the NPI be finalised and the NPI is structured to fit the level of Government funding available.***

AEBN believes there is a need for the establishment of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Commonwealth and the States and Territories to ensure that a consistent and acceptable level of Aggregated data is provided in the future. Further AEBN believes a template for Aggregated emissions should be developed for the States and Territories to input information into enabling direct comparisons between jurisdictions in the area of aggregated emissions.

AEBN considered it unfair and inappropriate for point sources to report emissions data when there is little information of aggregated emissions data available as they will be judged out of context. Supply of no or poor contextual information allows the community to receive only part of the story and does not deliver on the philosophy behind the NPI's supply of – "Community Right to Know".

***AEBN recommend that the NPI be amended to require point source discharges to be reported only when aggregated data for the region is also available.***

## **Review of Reporting Substances and Thresholds**

In general AEBN believes it is too soon to consider wholesale changes to either the reporting list or thresholds. It is also too early in the NPI process to consider significant changes to the reporting lists and thresholds at this stage.

With the inclusion of additional compounds for the next reporting period the only change which needs addressing is to ensure that "double counting" does not occur. A current

example of this is the inclusion of chemical groups such as VOCs is appropriate as these are commonly used indicators in the community and industry. Their inclusion should be conditional on the deletion of the specific compounds that make up VOCs.

The specific question of whether to include Greenhouse gases as a reporting category was not supported by the industries represented at the AEBN Briefing. The rationale behind the reporting list was on the basis of hazard and exposure. AEBN does not support the inclusion of greenhouse gases on this basis. Also a number of greenhouse gas accounting processes are currently being developed or already in place. The inclusion of greenhouse gases in the NPI will only further duplicate reporting which is already required by more than one other Government agency.

AEBN has identified a need for the standardisation of the reporting formats required by each jurisdiction. As many industries prepare reports for more than one jurisdiction a standard reporting format would simplify the procedure greatly.

The Victorian EPA has distributed to reporting facilities in Victoria an electronic program to assist with the reporting process. With minor modifications this program would be appropriate to be used across all jurisdictions.

***AEBN recommends that following the inclusion of generic chemical groupings into reporting requirements the specific chemicals within that grouping should be removed from the reporting list.***

***ABEN recommends a standardised reporting form/process should be developed and adopted without amendment by all jurisdictions.***

## **Reporting of Transfers**

AEBN does not support the inclusion of transfers to the NPI. The inclusion of transfers is inappropriate because:

- It will not add value to the effectiveness of the NPI;
- It will require significant resources from both point and aggregated sources to implement accurately;
- The emissions are generally not emissions to the natural environment and as such are inappropriate for inclusion;
- They will not provide an impetus for cleaner production or waste minimisation; and will be misleading to the community.

Transfers include amongst others discharges to sewer, discharges to landfills and materials sent for recycling. Discharges to tailings dams were not discussed, as members of the mining community were not present at the briefing.

The reporting of discharges to sewer is thought to be inappropriate as these discharges are already regulated and monitored under existing requirements. Accordingly the

community under existing mechanisms can easily access discharge details. As well most Trade Waste Agreements also require of industry the development and implementation of a Waste Management Plan. Accordingly the inclusion of trade waste information will achieve little yet will require significant resources on behalf of industry and particularly jurisdictions in relation to aggregated discharges. These resources are better allocated to achieving more significant environmental benefits.

At present quantities of “general” inert waste and municipal wastes are discharged to landfill by both the community and industry. The precise nature of this waste varies significantly from household to household and industry to industry but it is thought to be relatively inert and non-hazardous in nature. Inclusion of this material would again constitute the allocation of significant resources on behalf of all stakeholders for little benefit. Analysis of numerous waste streams would be required to determine if threshold limits were being triggered. Again these resources will achieve greater environment and communal benefit if directed to more worthwhile initiatives. Also data on the amounts and analysis of wastes is measured and held by most local and State Governments. Requiring this information under NPI would be duplicating current measurement and analysis practices.

AEBN similarly can see little benefit in reporting materials to be sent for recycling or for the disposal of prescribed or hazardous wastes. In Victoria for example Prescribed Waste disposal annual reporting is already required under existing regulation. In NSW quarterly reporting on hazardous wastes types and quantities is also required from generators. Inclusion of this in the NPI would duplicate this part of this report and would take additional resources as not all prescribed wastes are on NPI reporting lists and vice-versa.

The reporting of recycled materials is also inappropriate as those quoting NPI reported data could misuse the information. An example may be a company that send empty 205 l drums for recycling. It is not uncommon for industries to generate upward of 50 tonne of drums to be recycled. It would be misleading or even mischievous to suggest these companies are generating the equivalent mass of waste.

In general AEBN can see no justification for the inclusion of transfers in the NPI. To the contrary there are significant and sound reasons for transfers not to be included.

***AEBN recommends that the reporting of transfers are not incorporated into the NPI.***

### **Industry Handbooks**

As has been the case since their inception there continues to be significant difficulty in the application and usefulness of industry handbooks.

There is an urgent need for an independent review of industry handbooks with a view to providing handbooks that accurately reflect the precise Australian context in which they are to be applied.

***AEBN recommends the reviews of Industry Handbooks should be a periodic feature of the NPI in striving for more accurate emissions data.***

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion AEBN does not recommend significant amendment to the NPI at this stage. The NPI should be allowed to operate in its expanded form for a period of at least five years before any significant amendments should be contemplated.

AEBN believes it is inappropriate to include Transfers into the NPI and believes it also inappropriate to include Greenhouse gas emissions. We do however see the need for amendments to the provision of aggregated emission data and many of the Industry Handbooks that currently exist.