

Environment Protection Authority

EPA Board

Community and Environment Groups Forum 2016 summary report

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1 Introduction

This report summarises the proceedings of the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) Board consultation forum with Community and Environment Groups around the theme of *Social Licence to Operate: What is your level of acceptance?*

In accordance with section 19 of the *Environment Protection Act 1993* (the Act), the Board holds regular consultation sessions. These sessions aim to assist the EPA, the Board and the Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation, assess the views of interested bodies on matters related to the operation of the Act and protection of the environment.

The Community and Environment forum held on Tuesday 9 August focussed around what are the key elements of a successful relationship between industry and the community, and how the EPA could assist industry to boost capability and capacity to engage.

Proceedings were officially opened by EPA Board Presiding Member Linda Bowes followed by a 'on the couch' panel discussion led by EPA Chief Executive Tony Circelli. The panel comprised New Castalloy's Managing Director, Michael Tamasi and the Adelaide Brighton Cement Community Liaison Committee's Deputy Chair, John Ford.

Key themes arising from the panel discussion centred around the following:

- The importance of industry openness with the community and a willingness to engage and share experiences.
- The importance of industry staff having the right skills and experience to engage with the community.
- How improved community engagement can lead to improved business outcomes. A sign of success in this field is often positive community meetings that ultimately wane in interest.
- The importance of affected communities having input into relevant issues, along with the need for simple and succinct explanations from industry.

The community generally understands that an EPA licence provides authority to pollute to a certain level and that this is generally managed through an environmental licence. The EPA is often involved in a delicate balance to manage acceptable levels of pollution and impact on communities.

Following the panel discussion, participants were divided into five groups for a workshop around three questions.

2 Opening Address

EPA Board Presiding Member Linda Bowes officially opened the forum and outlined its purpose and the Board's objectives.

She spoke about the importance of understanding the wider context in which the EPA operates, and ensuring that the policies made and decisions taken, produce the best possible outcomes for the environment as well as incorporating social and economic factors.

Ms Bowes explained: "Social licence is the acceptance, by a community, of the presence of a project or industry in their area. It is that social licence, or community acceptance, that often will determine the success, or otherwise, of a business venture.

"Situations where industry and the community reside in close proximity can create significant tensions and competing priorities. The reason for proximity may be historical, due to planning decisions made in less enlightened times, when it seemed like a good idea to build homes next to factories so workers could walk to work and when environmental standards were not what they are today. Or it may be recent, as we see the transformation of our suburbs, with former industrial areas redeveloped for residential living."

She went on to say that many industries want to improve relationships with their local communities, but often lack the capacity or skills to be able to do that – particularly those smaller and medium-sized businesses. In a first for one of these community forums, some very proactive industry representatives have been invited to come along and discuss this topic. It's our hope that the different perspectives at the workshop will help the EPA to develop a very rounded view of the issue, and perhaps enable each participant to leave with a better understanding of each other's perspectives.

Ms Bowes said: "Last year's forum provided clear feedback that the EPA needed to look at ways to engage on a more regular basis and investigate how the EPA could better leverage community engagement efforts in partnership with other organisations. As a result of that feedback, the EPA has developed a dedicated community involvement function within the organisation, allowing improved face to face engagement, particularly at orphan contaminated sites."

Ms Bowes commented that a Community Engagement Champions Program, with eight EPA staff undergoing intensive training also occurred during the year so that they can be deployed to assist where needed across all areas of the EPA's business. The EPA also met with Local Government to explore how the EPA and councils can collaborate more closely on providing information to the community. In addition at this year's industry summit held in April, discussion focused on the need for industry to engage more effectively with the community.

"We look forward to the outcomes of discussions at today's forum being used in a positive way to ensure a better environment for the wellbeing and prosperity of all South Australians," added Ms Bowes.

3 Discussion

The workshop provided an opportunity for participants to have a detailed table discussion around three questions:

- What understanding of appropriate behaviour and practices should be in place for “a social licence to operate”? – (a) by industry (b) by the community
- To what extent have those behaviours and practices been addressed in the past?
- Where are the gaps and how can they be addressed?

Four broad themes emerged from the workshop:

Relationships are the key driver for effective engagement

It was agreed that for a company to have a social licence to operate, relationships must be respectful, open, honest and have integrity. Effective relationships are face-to-face, and involve a level of mutual understanding. Industry needs to be prepared to explain issues using common and simple language. At the same time, the community must be open to understanding industry, by seeking to acknowledge good industry behaviour and showing goodwill in recognising that industries may need time to implement changes.

Industries should adopt key principles to work with the community

Companies should build consultation with community into their business practices. This includes appropriate corporate policies relating to community engagement. For more long-term and complex issues, for example, community liaison groups with an independent chair may be an effective way to involve the community. Relevant community members should also be given the opportunity to contribute to communications planning.

Recognising that shareholders are also members of the community, and have their own expectations around how industry should behave. A very clear message of ‘do what you say you will do’ emerged during the workshop, with community representatives identifying that a key factor in communities losing trust in industry, is when promises are not delivered. The community acknowledged that commercially sensitive information may not be able to be shared, but nonetheless industries need to pursue transparency and accountability principles.

Difficult issues and challenges were identified

Current processes and systems within community groups for engaging with the wider community need to be addressed in relation to taking issues for wider comment. In addition, a joint industry community developed behaviour charter was suggested as a way for community groups and industry to clearly outline what practices are and are not acceptable.

Other challenges included achieving the balance between environment and social issues. It was also acknowledged that simple and straightforward communication was what all parties wanted.

The role of the EPA requires clarification

Questions arose about the role of the EPA regarding effective engagement. These included:

- Is the EPA’s role as a facilitator, arbitrator or independent advisor?
- If the EPA’s role is to facilitate engagement between industry and the community, then what does that look like?
- Does the EPA have a role to play in delivering engagement skills to industry?

4 Next Steps

Chief Executive Tony Circelli thanked guests for their participation.

Mr Circelli explained that the forum was built on an assumption that we share a common goal seeking a sustainable environment and more effective relationships. The key outcome of the forum was that participants helped bring together the various dimensions in the relationship between industry and the community. He noted that there was a shared view for a more sustainable future with engagement and dialogue being a critical part of achieving this. Reinforcing that in the end, we all want a more liveable place to live and work. Participants were urged to continue to show leadership within their communities noting that achieving these goals is incredibly hard work, emotionally draining and requires significant courage.

The EPA is in a unique position to see first-hand how innovation and excellent outcomes often arise from difficult circumstances. There are many examples of businesses that have faced environmental problems, or sought to lower their environmental footprint through reducing wastewater discharges or air emissions, and using those challenges to further invest and drive ongoing innovation. In seeking further opportunities, these businesses have also built stronger and more robust relationships with their local communities.

The following next steps were identified during the forum:

- A report will be prepared by the EPA providing a summary of what 'good' looks like in terms of a social licence to operate.
- The EPA will clarify its role in more formal engagement forums, including explaining its role as a facilitator and regulator.

Closing remarks

The Hon Ian Hunter MLC, Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation thanked participants for their contribution, noting that it is sessions like these that provide the opportunity to reflect on the past, and to consider what we have learned and how do we best apply those learnings.

The EPA Board would like to thank all attendees for their valuable insight and participation at the event.

Appendix 1 Delegates

First name	Last name	Organisation
John	Ford	Adelaide Brighton Cement Community Liaison Committee
Tu	Bui	Adelaide Brighton Cement
Tim	Radimissis	Adelaide Brighton Cement
Sarah	Hill	AECOM
Tina	Meakin	Beverley Community Group
Susan	Ovenden	Beverley Community Group
Doug	Scotney	Beverley Community Group
David	Loftus	Cement Concrete & Aggregates Australia
Johan	Meline	Clean Air Society SA Branch
Alex	French	Community Representative
Craig	Wilkins	Conservation Council SA
Tricia	Curtis	Conservation Volunteers SA
Melissa	Ballantyne	Environmental Defenders Office (SA) Inc
Warwick	Moyse	Friends of Sellicks
Anthea	Blenkiron	GM Holden Pty Ltd
Grace	Barila	KESAB environmental solutions
Pat	Larobina	Monroe
Michael	Tamasi	New Castalloy
Peter	Bicknell	O-I Community Consultation Group
Jacqui	Dibden	Port Adelaide Residents Environment Protection Group (PAREPG)
Tony	Bazeley	Port Adelaide Residents Environment Protection Group (PAREPG)
Lionel	Edwards	Residents of Inner North-West Adelaide Incorporated (RINWAI)

EPA representatives

First name	Last name	Organisation
Keith	Baldry	A/Director Strategy and Business
Linda	Bowes	Presiding Member
Tony	Circelli	Chief Executive
Melinda	Clarke	Manager, Communications and Executive Office
Ros	DeGaris	Board Member
Rob	Fowler	Board Member
Allan	Holmes	Deputy Presiding Member
Rachel	Hudson	Principal Advisor Community Engagement
Helen	Macdonald	Board Member
Hannah	Pitcher	Executive Officer
Christine	Trenorden	Board Member
Greg	Tyczenko	A/Operations Director, Mining, Radiation and Regulatory Support
Mark	Withers	Board Member
Andrew	Wood	Executive Director, Operations