

Environment Protection Authority

EPA Board

**Environment and Community Groups
Forum 2015 summary report**

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1 Executive summary

This report summarises the proceedings of the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) consultation forum with environment and community groups in Adelaide's northwestern suburbs around the theme of *Tough Conversations, Active Engagement*.

In accordance with section 19 of the *Environment Protection Act 1993* (the Act), the Board holds regular consultation sessions 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.

This year, the Board again decided, as part of its stakeholder and community engagement program, to host a number of consultations in order to fulfil this requirement. A business and industry summit was held in May 2015 followed by the Environment and Community Group forum in June and a regional summit in July.

The format and focus for the consultation session was designed to provide an opportunity for interested community and environment group members to consider the role of the EPA, major environmental issues currently impacting on the well-being and prosperity of their particular area and to explore how the EPA and the community can better work together to monitor and protect the environment.

The forum participants were divided into five groups and discussed the following questions:

- What are the major issues currently impacting on the well being and prosperity of your suburb – in other words what is happening in your backyard that we should be aware of? And what do you see as the role of the EPA in relation to these issues?
- How do you perceive the role of the EPA? In addition to being a regulator, how do we act as a facilitator, enabler and engager in your area ie what do these things mean to you?
- What should we, as a community and as a regulator, be doing to ensure we hand our environment in a good state to future generations in particular when it comes to dealing with current and historic environmental issues/pressures?
- What do you think the EPA is doing well and what can we do better? What are the key actions that you as a community can take to improve the current state of play and what do you expect from the EPA?
- What do you think the community expects from the EPA when it comes to communicating on environmental issues such as site contamination and other potential public health issues? What should the EPA do to better understand those expectations?

The outcomes of the forum will be reflected in an EPA Partnerships and Engagement Framework.

The community also requested clarity around the role of the EPA and interactions with other government departments, local government, stakeholders and the community.

2 Opening address by Presiding Member Mia Handshin

Ms Handshin officially opened the forum and outlined the purpose of the event and the Board's objectives.

- > The EPA exists to ensure a better environment for the well-being and prosperity of all South Australians. As the state's independent environment protection regulator our goal is to ensure good quality land, water, air, safe use of radiation, protection from unacceptable noise and sustainable use of resources.
- > Twenty years ago the EPA was established 'to work positively and constructively with industry and community to achieve cost-effective pollution prevention, waste reduction and management'.
- > The forum is one of several on the Board's annual engagement program and we sincerely value the perspectives offered by all participants.
- > We take the time to engage with you, not just because the Act requires us to, but because through working with you, we are better able to understand and address emerging environmental issues, particularly those in your backyards.
- > The overarching theme of today's forum is *Tough Conversations, Active Engagement* and the EPA have posed five related questions for table discussion.
- > The reality is that from time to time, the EPA's role is to facilitate some tough conversations with the community about site contamination, air quality, noise or issues relating to the operations of a licensee. Sometimes these issues produce some anxiety in the community. It is the EPA's job to respond with sensitivity, instilling trust and offering reassurance while providing authoritative expertise based on sound but sometimes still-evolving and often quite complex science.
- > In the past 12 months the EPA has had some notable opportunities to build on existing approaches to communications and engagement, and further refine the way we convey information about potential health risks without sparking unwarranted fear in the community. The EPA is committed to continuous improvement and to walking closely 'with' community members throughout the engagement process to ensure you know what we know, when we know it.
- > At the heart of the Environment Protection Act is the recognition that 'environmental protection' works best when there is partnership between and investment by the community in the EPA. We need engaged citizens to help act as our eyes and ears, reporting on issues of environmental significance, working with us, holding us to account. So we need to find new ways to mobilize and enlist people.
- > In May, the EPA launched its new website and its Strategic Directions for 2015-2018.
- > We are working hard to meet changing community expectations and we are looking for the assistance of the community in helping us to better understand those expectations, identify new ways of rising to challenges, and working in partnership with us to ensure a better environment for the well being and prosperity of all South Australians

3 Address by Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation, Hon Ian Hunter MLC

Minister Hunter welcomed attendees and made the following remarks:

- > The EPA undertakes an enormous breadth of work that touches on almost every aspect of our lives. In order for the EPA to carry out their work effectively, they need to understand the concerns within the community. Forums such as this allow for a conversation to take place where ideas and suggestions can be shared, and feedback provided. I commend the EPA for their strong focus on consultation.
- > The state government recognises that, unless we engage with the community in a meaningful way, it is difficult to achieve the best results. None of us operate in a vacuum and it is important that we all play our part, especially when it comes to addressing environmental issues.
- > As leaders in your community groups and organisations, you know how important it is to meaningfully represent the people who nominated you. I encourage all attendees to be honest in their feedback and suggestions and pose the following questions as thought starters:
 - What are your thoughts in respect to the EPA's work?
 - What are the main concerns in your local area or organisation? Are these being addressed?
 - Can you suggest improvements?
- > The input of attendees today will help inform the EPA's planning going forward and facilitate better communication in the future. There is a growing enthusiasm and willingness within the wider community to address these complex issues and there is a real sense of optimism within this new found enthusiasm. We will do our best to take advantage of that momentum.
- > It is also important that we work at all levels in order to effect real and lasting change. Initiatives and negotiations at a global and national level are important, but so is the work being undertaken at a sub-national and local level, especially because it has an immediate effect on people's lives and allows everyone to be part of making a difference. This is why it is so important to strengthen the partnership between the EPA, local government, community and industry.
- > Thank you all for taking the time to participate today. I wish you a very successful afternoon and highly productive discussions, and I very much look forward to hearing the ideas and suggestions generated this afternoon.
- > It now gives me great pleasure to officially open the 2015 EPA Community and Environment Groups Forum.

4 Forum process

Delegates were presented with five focus questions for discussion:

- 1 What are the major issues currently impacting on the well being and prosperity of your suburb – in other words what is happening in your backyard that we should be aware of? And what do you see as the role of the EPA in relation to these issues?
- 2 How do you perceive the role of the EPA? In addition to being a regulator, how do we act as a facilitator, enabler and engager in your area ie what do these things mean to you?
- 3 What should we, as a community and as a regulator, be doing to ensure we hand our environment in a good state to future generations in particular when it comes to dealing with current and historic environmental issues/pressures?
- 4 What do you think the EPA is doing well and what can we do better? What are the key actions that you as a community can take to improve the current state of play and what do you expect from the EPA?
- 5 What do you think the community expects from the EPA when it comes to communicating on environmental issues such as site contamination and other potential public health issues? What should the EPA do to better understand those expectations?

Delegates were seated at five tables with a pre-determined table captain and accompanied by a Board member and a senior EPA staff member. Each table discussed the focus questions for 60 minutes.

Special thanks to the following table captains:

- Mr Bob Lott, President, Nature Foundation SA
- Mr Craig Wilkins, Chief Executive, Conservation Council of South Australia
- Ms Fiona Jenkins, Coordinator Waste + Sustainability, City of Charles Sturt
- Mr John Phillips, Executive Director, KESAB Environmental Solutions
- Mr Peter Bicknell, Chair, Adelaide Brighton Cement Community Liaison Committee

A full set of notes taken during the discussions can be found at [Appendix 2](#).

These discussions were reported back to the wider summit by the allocated captain from each table.

EPA Chief Executive Tony Circelli summarised the key messages arising, reinforced the importance of the views expressed, and committed to providing delegates with this summary report which would also be submitted to the Minister.

5 Summary of key themes by EPA Chief Executive Tony Circelli

Mr Circelli thanked all of the attendees for their input and provided the following summary thoughts:

- > The community want to see more the EPA more visibly in their area.
- > The EPA is serious about safeguarding the environment for future generations.
- > The EPA needs to continue to test the effectiveness of our relationships – trust, confidence, a genuine relationship and building that relationship further. It is so easy to lose that trust and confidence.
- > The EPA needs to be better engagers as an organisation and continue to challenge the way things have been done in the past.
- > There are still a number of tough issues that the EPA needs to listen to and commit to active engagement on these issues.
- > Keeping people informed and engaged is one of the EPA's key strategic priorities and it will continue to try and improve this.
- > The perception is that it is difficult to find the right people to connect with in the EPA. How do the community get access to the right people.
- > What do the results of testing data (for example air quality monitoring) mean for us, how do they affect our health?
- > The importance of how we build understanding of our role within the community. Agreed that it is about clarity and developing trust, which works both ways.
- > How can the EPA position themselves to be seen as an agency of regulation and protection but also remediation? Intergenerational and sustainability issues, what are the opportunities for the EPA to get on the front foot in dealing with these issues in a proactive way?
- > The importance of education, honest and accurate information dissemination; providing the community with the information they need in the timeframes they need. How does the EPA best achieve this?
- > How does the EPA disseminate and distribute the information we hold effectively in the community? How do the community recognise and understand the data they can have access to?
- > Clarity of the role of the EPA – understanding of what this is. Give consideration to a single source of information on chronic risk issues associated with public health.
- > In summary:
 - Relationships – government, other stakeholders, community, invitation to better use the networks that exist to do our job more effectively and efficiently.
 - Use current structures (ie committees, council networks, etc) to develop trust and spread the message more effectively and efficiently.
 - More services from the EPA as an educator – empower communities to solve their own problems and provide leadership to develop this capability.
 - Timeliness of communications – do not wait to understand the report, tell them what we do know, what we do not know and what we are going to do about not knowing.
 - Be seen to be proactive every day, not just in crisis moments (ambient air quality, water quality and noise data).
- > The EPA is developing a Partnerships and Engagement Framework for the future; outcomes of the session today will be incorporated.
- > Getting the broader, more general message out to the community.

- > We look forward to working with both the community and industry towards more sustainable practices, and the most effective mechanisms to achieve this.

6 Next steps

As a result of the discussions at the forum, the EPA commits to taking the various messages we heard around engagement and keeping the community informed and incorporating those messages into strategies and actions for the EPA Partnerships and Engagement Framework.

The EPA will continue to investigate ways it can better engage and communicate with community groups and individuals, identified in this session, on a regular basis.

The EPA will endeavour to ensure in all our publications are clear and concise in order to inform the community and change the perception of the role of the EPA. We will endeavour to clarify our role and how we interact and relate with other government departments, local government, stakeholders and the community.

The EPA will explore ways we can leverage our community engagement efforts through and in partnership with the network of engagement officers employed by local government across the state.

Appendix 1 Attendees

First name	Last name	Representing
Nick	Anderson	City of Charles Sturt
Melissa	Ballantyne	Environmental Defenders Office (SA) Inc
Tony	Bazeley	Port Adelaide Residents Environment Group
Ron	Bellchambers	Brownhill Creek Association
Peter	Bicknell	Adelaide Brighton Cement Community Liaison Committee
Rob	Bosley	Friends of Gulf St Vincent
Leni	Brown	St Clair Residents Association
Craig	Clarke	City of Marion
Jim	Douglas	Western Adelaide Coastal Residents Association
Lionel	Edwards	Residents of Inner North-West Adelaide Incorporated (RINWAI)
John	Ford	Adelaide Brighton Cement Community Liaison Committee
Jeff	Foulkes	Nature Conservation Society of SA
Brendan	Hall	O-I Community Consultation Group
Tim	Hoile	Marine Discovery Centre
Craig	Hughes	City of Port Adelaide Enfield
Karen	James	Port Adelaide Residents Environment Group
Fiona	Jenkins	City of Charles Sturt
Vikram	Kenjle	Australian Industry Group
Bob	Lott	Nature Foundation SA
Nadia	McLaren	Conservation Council of SA
Johan	Meline	Clean Air Society SA Branch
Valli	Morphett	Charles Sturt City Council
John	Phillips OAM	KESAB environmental solutions
Tanya	Roe	City of Holdfast Bay
Pete	Schultz	Western Adelaide Coastal Residents Association
Ian	Steel	Office of Hon Susan Close MP
Val	Wales	Tennyson Dunes Group
Tim	Walsh	Port Adelaide Environment Forum
Carolyn	Wigg	SA Heritage Council
Craig	Wilkins	Conservation Council of SA

Environment Protection Authority representatives

First name	Surname	Position
Ros	Agate	Director Strategy and Business
Keith	Baldry	Operations Director, Mining, Radiation and Regulatory Support
Linda	Bowes	Board Member
Brenda	Champion	Communications Officer
Tony	Circelli	Board Member and Chief Executive
Ros	DeGaris	Board Member
Peter	Dolan	Operations Director, Science, Assessment and Planning
Rob	Fowler	Board Member
Mia	Handshin	Presiding Member, EPA Board
Allan	Holmes	Board Member
Briony	Pick	Project Officer
Helen	Macdonald	Board Member
Tim	Saul	Manager, Stakeholder Engagement
Mark	Withers	Board Member
Andrew	Wood	Executive Director, Operations

Appendix 2 Notes from discussion

Group 1

1 What are the major issues currently impacting on the well-being and prosperity of your suburb – in other words what is happening in your backyard that we should be aware of? And what do you see as the role of the EPA in relation to these issues?

- > Brownhill Creek Conservation Park is historic (when in its natural state). However the following matters pose significant risk:
 - Threat of concrete dams.
 - Upper Brownhill Creek flood mitigation options close (due to funding).
 - Water quality issues.
 - DEWNR does not have the funding but want to work with agencies to raise public funds.
 - The EPA is invisible.
- > Asbestos concerns at the Bianco site.
- > The importance of liaising with the EPA and community groups on management plans.
- > The community needs to better understand the relationships between the EPA and other state government agencies and local government.
- > Asbestos issues identified particularly in older properties, but difficult to find agency (SA Health, EPA) to take control particularly around the associated public health risks.
- > There is a general frustration with the lack of action taken in government, eg Owens-Illinois engagement group
- > EPA engagement can be hit and miss, depends on the quality and knowledge of the staff member you speak with.
- > Conflict between industrial and residential areas, particularly highlighted in the Port Adelaide area and the ongoing concerns of the community with Adelaide Brighton Cement.
- > The EPA are too industry focused.
- > Community receiving feedback from the EPA that focussing on the impact is not possible.
- > Message from the top needed (politically) the importance of the environment.
- > Real issue is what is happening to people not what is monitored.
- > Focus on perceived problems vs. industry standards needs review.
- > Focus on stacks doesn't correlate with 'common sense' approach.
- > Trust and confidence in a body to make a definitive assessment. Who is that body and what is their ability to make a definitive assessment?
- > Funding is a problem throughout.
- > Relationships between agencies and people's understanding of the role of the EPA.
- > Limitations in assessing risk.

Fiona Jenkins (Coordinator Waste + Sustainability, City of Charles Sturt) summarised the discussion noting that it can be difficult to communicate with the EPA and the level of frustration at times can be quite high. It is not just about the environment but it is about the people, their properties and the safety of their environment. Community, local government and government agencies need to work together. Clarify the role of each area and assist the community to understand this.

2 How do you perceive the role of the EPA? In addition to being a regulator, how do we act as a facilitator, enabler and engager in your area ie. what do these things mean to you?

- > Community needs to know more about how they can get help/who can help and what the community can do themselves.
- > Build relationships and develop trust.
- > The EPA is weak – does not utilise powers, could do more, community are frustrated by the gradual/softly approach.
- > Concern about EPA resources being inadequate.
- > Query about 'independence'.
- > Secretive?
- > Government and EPA – communications? Connections? What relationships exist? Consistency?
- > Better relationship needed between the EPA and local government – important with local issues.
- > Need to keep others informed who the community will go to (eg councils).
- > Need to keep people well and healthy.
- > Need to understand local issues.
- > Lack of information fuels panic/controversy/fear.
- > The community does not expect all the answers, they just need to know what is going on.
- > Will get information from those who are talking – this may be misleading or incorrect.
- > Rapid communication.
- > Communicate regularly via established community links and groups.
- > Up-to-date information that is easily accessible (website).
- > Use others to help get the message out.

Craig Wilkins (Conservation Council of SA) reported that their table discussion had been around three main themes:

- Desire for rapid communication, especially when there is upset in the community highlighting the importance of real-time social media.
- Tension inherent in the foot in foot out of government role. The EPA is trying to be independent but comes across often as secretive because of the affiliation with government and often perceived to be weak
- Relationships – community and the EPA. Use community groups and local government to ensure information flow.
- Yearning for more. The community wants the EPA to be a capable regulator and yet there is huge tensions with lack of funding.

3 What should we, as a community and as a regulator, be doing to ensure we hand our environment in a good state to future generations in particular when it comes to dealing with current and historic environmental issues/pressures?

- > Education is important – support environmental education.
- > The EPA needs to be educated – more proactive.
- > How will we monitor evidence of health of the coast? 2013 report – what happens next?
- > Key is to get the right people – current staff are very good.
- > Opportunities to work with other departments to improve the environment.
- > Powers for the EPA when commenting on developments – \$ limit should be reduced.
- > The EPA needs to not just say now when assessing development applications.

- > Community wants messages about if things are getting better or worse.
- > The EPA needs more teeth to deal with licensees.
- > Expectation that the EPA will ACT!
- > Honest and accurate information sought by the community.
- > Building materials – EPA needs to put out more information on hazards during renovation.
- > Important to have a liaison group on licencing.
- > Mobilise the community – should EPA be a leader in remediation?
- > Role of the EPA? Need to be more proactive about inherited problems.
- > Positive messages needed.
- > Hotline – people must get feedback.
- > Hazards – no apparent way of ranking, how to elevate?

Bob Lott (President, Nature Foundation SA) advised that their discussion had been around a series of individual matters which came back to a series of overall issues. Support for historic buildings and information for those restoring them, disseminate more information about care of the coast, community would like to see the EPA have greater regulatory powers – stronger teeth particularly in the role of development, more honesty and accuracy in emerging and critical issues while recognising the dual role. Two critical things were highlighted as the importance of education and proactive leadership from the EPA.

4 What do you think the EPA is doing well and what can we do better? What are the key actions that you as a community can take to improve the current state of play and what do you expect from the EPA?

- > The EPA should be involved in the early stages of planning to ensure environmental issues are covered and there is sufficient agency engagement.
- > Share progress on issues with the community, use different mechanisms ie councils, newsletters, social media, etc.
- > Ensure consultation is genuine.
- > Make reports readily available and accurate.
- > Help the public understand what is going on and where to go when they have an issue.
- > The EPA does a good job but better messaging is needed.
- > New website is not easy to find publications and reports.
- > Bring the public with you on the journey!
- > The community expects the EPA to have an overarching role and authority.
- > Be more proactive rather than reactive.
- > The EPA could improve the public awareness of the breadth of what they do.
- > Drive more things like urban drainage.
- > The EPA needs to have a greater impact on planning.
- > Communication mechanisms – use social media, apps, blogging for regional connections, TV and radio reports on report findings, partnering EPA and local government for community connections, use SA Water billing network to distribute information.
- > Communication of environmental issues of a regional nature – site contamination, dunes, air quality issues, etc.

John Phillips (Executive Director, KESAB Environmental Solutions) advised that there was strong agreement at his table that the EPA is doing a great job. However, communication is a key area for improvement and further consideration. The importance of reporting and sharing the good news stories and showing leadership to the community. Improve the interface with the community, usability of the website, responsiveness from the call centre, provide better linkages (with

SA Water). Summary of the discussion was around risk-based engagement, cross-agency outcomes, decision-making processes and being more proactive.

5 What do you think the community expects from the EPA when it comes to communicating on environmental issues such as site contamination and other potential public health issues? What should the EPA do to better understand those expectations?

- > Interested in health of River Torrens – not sure EPA is main driver to get information from.
- > The EPA to be strong/educator/responsive – the community want the EPA to forewarn.
- > Award for good environmental management – good practices.
- > Aware of Beach Alert program – if living in the area where there was once industry, would want to know what was underneath.
- > Should be warned early rather than late, continue to put information on the website.
- > Sources of pollution and point source seem to be the focus, make all private pollution public.
- > Neither environmental nor protection appear in strategic objectives.
- > Daily results on what is happening in environment, eg like value of the dollar.
- > Should have access to more rudimentary information – EPA is small.
- > Not feeling connected to the EPA – do not want to be called a client.
- > General ambient environment could be made healthier.
- > Engagement needs to be provided at a different level, focus on crisis management
- > The EPA when it communicates should become a lead agency and bring all the parties together.
- > Subjective view of the community is important.
- > The community wants to know what the raw data means from a health perspective.
- > The EPA should be able to tell people what they know.
- > Thank you to EPA for always being present at community meetings – the community expects them to be there and be honest.
- > Example of odour app used for Adelaide Glass, which had good community involvement in the development process.
- > The community expects the truth and straightforward communications.

Peter Bicknell (Chair, Adelaide Brighton Community Liaison Group) outlined the discussion at his table and reported that they were looking for straightforward information and data in a timely way. The EPA should more often take the lead in issuing information to the community about complex issues, to facilitate the implications of distributed information and have a focus at times more on the point of pollution to the chronic environmental issues.