

The National Public Health Partnership emailed to
GPO Box 4057
MELBOURNE VIC 3001

28th August 2006

Dear Sir/Madam

Re; “enHealth Report – “The Health Effects of Environmental Noise – Other Than Hearing Loss”

In May 2004 a report titled “The Health Effects of Environmental Noise – other than Hearing Loss” was developed for the enHealth Council by the New South Wales Health Department, with money provided by the *Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing*. (In effect, this important report was funded by Australian taxpayers).

The primary aims of this document were to present a review of the health effects, other than hearing loss, of environmental noise, and a review of the measures (national and international) directed at management of environmental noise, and to make recommendations.

This extensive document made four major recommendations:

- (1) Recognise environmental noise as a potential health concern (with two suggested actions).
- (2) Promote measures to reduce environmental noise and its health impacts (with seven suggested actions).
- (3) Address environmental noise in planning and development activities (with four suggested actions).
- (4) Foster research on the non-auditory health impacts of noise (with the following suggested research agenda:
 - A national noise survey.
 - Effects on learning performance in children, sleep disturbance, annoyance and cardiovascular health and mental wellbeing.
 - Identification of populations most sensitive to noise and vulnerable to non-auditory health effects (the findings should inform environmental, planning and health policies).
 - Given the prevalence of cardiovascular disease and its associated cost to society, further research appears prudent to examine noise as a risk factor (the link between environmental noise and high blood pressure(hypertension) and ischemic heart disease, as suggested by cross-sectional literature, is by no means conclusive at the moment).
 - Evaluation of noise reduction schemes on community health (intervention studies).
 - Longitudinal studies, dose-response studies.
 - Appropriate attention to study design, sampling and sample sizes, control of confounders, investigation of factors modifying the effects, precise exposure estimation and precise measurement of outcomes.

Additionally, the report recommended that further areas for research in Australia are sleep disturbance, annoyance, school children’s performance, cardiovascular disease and wellbeing. “Health agencies have a critical role to play in developing the research framework with academic institutions, transport, and environment and planning agencies.”

I wish to draw your attention to Table 6 of the enHealth Report:

“Priority Actions for Addressing Non-Auditory Health Impacts of Environmental Noise”.

This table names the agencies responsible for addressing the health impacts of environmental noise, the issues and the actions required by each agency and the suggested level of priority.

The agencies are:

- (1) State and Territory health agencies
- (2) enHealth Council
- (3) Stakeholders and non-government organizations
- (4) Key researchers
- (5) Environment, Transport and Planning Agencies and Local Government
- (6) CSIRO

- (7) Environment Australia
- (8) Regulatory Authorities
- (9) Academics
- (10) Consumer Associations
- (11) Australian Building Codes Board, Australian Government
- (12) Professional Associations
- (13) Local Government Health Agencies
- (14) Key health, consumer, environment and planning stakeholders

Six out of seven recommended actions delegated **High Priority** responsibility to the enHealth Council.

I would appreciate advice as to your department's endeavours to address the recommendations within the enHealth Report, and to what extent your department is liaising with the above agencies.

In particular, we would like to receive what information your department has regarding the **high priority** recommendations in Table 6, Pages 53 and 54:-

Issue: Noise Policy. **Action:** *“Formally acknowledge there is sufficient evidence to establish a link between noise and health and to warrant further consideration of the issue. Until more noise positive conclusive research is completed, the WHO Guidelines for Community Noise 1999 can be considered as primary reference for national environmental noise goals.”*

Issue: Noise Research. **Action:** *“Confirm priority areas for health research from sleep disturbance, annoyance and school performance, cardiovascular effects on wellbeing. Explore the nature of noise and impacts on sensitive populations (for example, children). Review adequacy of existing health guidelines in state and territory legislation”.*

Issue: Noise Action Plans. **Action:** *“Review existing legislation across all levels of government. Develop national and state action plans for both long and short-term to integrate planning and research at all levels of government. Adopt a collaborative approach among responsible agencies.”*

It would be appreciated if you could advise which group *initiated* this report, and to what extent those persons indicated their expectations that the formal/final recommendations in the Report would be followed through, particularly those which were ultimately given high priority? If Ms Anne Carroll's working group still exists, would it be possible to establish what steps were taken before the report was commenced, to ensure that quantifiable population health benefits ensue?

We would be grateful if you could please advise of the total cost of the investment in this splendid report, together with full details of how the recommendations made within it have progressed to date. We value the decision taken by Government to substantiate the risks from noise in our living and working environments, but are confused by the lack of progress from the time the report has been tabled.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

Yours sincerely

Gary Goland

For and on behalf of Noise Watch Australia.