

BURKE Natalie

From: LYNCH Paul
Sent: Wednesday, 16 December 2015 12:48 PM
To: Matt Peacock; Matthewjpeacock@hotmail.com
Cc: Media DNRM
Subject: RE: Black Lung - Peacock response
Attachments: Rathus Report 1984.pdf

Importance: High

Here you go Matt. Sorry for the delay

Attached is a copy of the May 1984 Rathus-Abrahams report and the department's response covering your questions.

As discussed, this report was never secret or hidden.

In fact, the report, its findings and follow-up action were discussed in the **published 33rd annual report of the Queensland Coal Board in 1984.**

I will forward you a copy of the 33rd annual report of the Queensland Coal Board separately.

RESPONSE:

The following comments can be attributed to a spokesperson for the Queensland Department of Natural Resources and Mines.

"There have been three confirmed cases of pneumoconiosis reported by the Queensland coal industry since May 2015. The department has been advised that three suspected cases are currently being investigated but have not yet been confirmed by medical assessment.

In Queensland, all coal mine workers are required to undergo a mandatory *Coal Mine Workers' Health Scheme* medical assessment prior to the start of their employment and then at least once every five years.

How the scheme works is here: <https://www.business.qld.gov.au/industry/mining/safety-health/mining-safety-health/medical/coal-board-medical>

The results of health assessments undertaken through the *Coal Mine Workers' Health Scheme* are provided by the medical professionals involved to the mine worker. A copy is subsequently provided to the department for recording on a safety and health database and storage.

What the department receives are copies of medical assessments and x-rays that have already been completed and reviewed by a doctor and qualified radiologist then returned to the patient.

1984 Rathus-Abrahams Report:

The Rathus-Abrahams report was never secret or hidden. In fact, the report and its findings were discussed in the published 33rd annual report of the Queensland Coal Board in 1984.

The annual report also said the report had been published and distributed; including: "*Copies of the Medical Consultants' Report have been widely circulated and the Board has requested comments on the findings and recommendations.*"

A copy of the Rathus-Abrahams report is also available on the department's website.

The former Queensland Coal Board was a tripartite body comprising senior representatives of the coal industry, mining unions and the mines department.

In December 1982, the Board authorised the development of a coal miners' health scheme which started on 1 January 1983 with a programme to survey by chest x-ray and lung function test all colliery employees and recently-retired coal miners in Queensland.

The report delivered to the Queensland Coal Board by Dr E.M. Rathus and Dr E.W. Abrahams in May 1984 was a review of that industrial health survey conducted by the Department of Health between 1 March 1983 and April 1984.

Dr Rathus and Dr Abrahams were medical consultants to the Queensland Coal Board.

Their report says that appropriate action was taken by the Queensland Health Department where suspected pneumoconiosis or abnormalities were detected during the 1983-84 health survey.

It says a medical report was to be provided to the patient and his nominated doctor and a copy would also be provided to the Health Department's Director of Tuberculosis and the Assistant Director (Chest Diseases), Division of Environmental and Occupational Health, for retention and follow-up.

Queensland Health would be best placed to advise whether it retains archived records of follow-up action taken on individual cases at the time.

As a result of the Rathus-Abrahams report, recommendations were made for a permanent health scheme for coal miners, which the Queensland Coal Board commenced in May 1993 as the *Coal Industry Employees' Health Scheme*.

The current *Coal Mine Workers' Health Scheme* evolved from that scheme."

ENDS

Paul Lynch

Media Manager

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Note: the Media Unit has a generic email address: media@dnrm.qld.gov.au

From: Matt Peacock [mailto:Peacock.Matt@abc.net.au]
Sent: Monday, 14 December 2015 12:40 PM
To: LYNCH Paul
Subject: RE: Black Lung - Peacock response

Paul,

Thanks for that.

We are interested in doing a follow-up story on 7.30 about the issue later this week, if possible.

Can you advise me if any further cases of Queensland coal miners' pneumoconiosis have been recently identified, in addition to the three cited by the Minister?

Is it possible for someone from the Department explain to us on camera the current process of medical surveillance for coal miners, ie, spirometry and X-rays at regular (five yearly?) intervals by RMAs (?)- then the files are sent to the Department for later review? Does that summarise the process? If not, could you or someone else perhaps walk me through it?

The information about Dr Rathus' report is very helpful. Given that you have located the report, can we have a copy? If not, why not?

We are particularly interested in finding out why this report has remained secret until now, given the importance of its findings.

You say the report states that "appropriate action was taken in cases where abnormality was identified". What action was that?

If you don't know, are you trying to find out?

It would be great if you could call me as soon as convenient.

Regards,

Matt



Matt Peacock
Senior Journalist

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From: LYNCH Paul [mailto:Paul.Lynch@dnrm.qld.gov.au]
Sent: Tuesday, 1 December 2015 5:15 PM
To: Matt Peacock
Subject: FW: Black Lung - Peacock response

Matt

The following comments can be attributed to a spokesman for the Queensland Department of Natural Resources and Mines:

Is coal miners' pneumoconiosis a notifiable disease?

Pneumoconiosis is not currently listed as a notifiable disease.

How many cases of black lung have been recorded in Queensland, when?

While there have not been recorded cases of pneumoconiosis in Queensland for nearly three decades, the department has obtained a copy of Dr Rathus' 1983 report which identified 75 cases of pneumoconiosis.

A 1983 study of Queensland coal miner X-rays by the former Director of Occupational Health, Dr Mannie Rathus, identified 75 cases of black lung and 499 abnormal X-rays. Where is that study? Was it ever made public? What happened to those workers? Were they followed up, notified, compensated or counselled in any way? What action was taken as a result of that study?

1. The department has obtained a copy of the report.
2. The study was conducted under direction of the Queensland Coal Board. It is not known how widely the report was disseminated.
3. The report states that "appropriate action was taken in cases where abnormality was identified. It is not known whether they were compensated in any way.
4. As a result of that study, recommendations were made for a permanent health scheme for coal miners, which the Queensland Coal Board commenced in May 1993 as the Coal Industry Employees' Health Scheme.

Percy Verrall, one of the recently identified miners with black lung from Ipswich, left employment in 1997. Was the Department aware then that he had been diagnosed with black lung? When did it become aware? Should it have been aware sooner?

1. The Department was not aware of Mr Verrell's health condition. His last Coal Industry Employees' Health Scheme medical assessment in 1995 by a private practitioner, did not include a chest X-ray.
2. The Department became aware of Mr Verrall's condition in July 2015 as a result of reports from the CFMEU.

He says he met in St Andrews Hospital a workmate from the Tivoli mine and two other miners all with black lung, and he was made aware by Mines dept officers in a recent visit that another worker with the disease who lived nearby him. That's four additional cases. Is that correct? What does the Mines Dept know of cases other than the four recently identified by the union?

The Department knows only about the three confirmed and one potential case of pneumoconiosis recently identified.

How long has DNRM been aware of the lack of B readers or qualified medical professionals to review X-rays?

The College of Radiologists confirms that they train their radiologists to the relevant ILO Standard. However, one of the issues that Prof Simm's review will consider is whether a cohort of radiologists should be given specific further training on recognising pneumoconiosis.

Paul Lynch

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NOTE: The media unit has a generic email address: media@dnrm.qld.gov.au

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Released under
RTI Act 2009

Natural Resources & Mines Media Enquiry – Response

Media Unit contact: Paul Lynch	Briefing officer: Paul Harrison
Media Unit phone: 3199 8250	Phone: 3199 8007
Approved by: Paul Harrison, Mark Stone, James Purtill	
Phone:	Deadline to media unit:

Date: 14 December 2015

Reporter: Matt Peacock, ABC 7.30 Report

Phone and email: Matthewjpeacock@hotmail.com peacock.matt@abc.net.au

Reporter's deadline:

Issue: more pneumoconiosis questions

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ENDS

Background (Minister's Office only)

Link to DNRM webpage

<https://www.business.qld.gov.au/industry/mining/safety-health/mining-safety-health/medical/coal-board-medical/pneumoconiosis-screening>

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RTI Act 2009