



NSW Port Authority suspends overnight ship berthing at White Bay until low-sulphur fuel use regulated

By Lucy Marks

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The New South Wales Port Authority has suspended overnight cruise ships from berthing at Sydney's White Bay Terminal in response to community concerns about fuel fumes.

It said the ocean liners will be prevented from docking overnight at the terminal at Balmain until the State Government regulates low-sulphur fuel use in the harbour.

The move has been welcomed by the Leichhardt Council but it said the terminal also needed to be fitted with shore-based power so ships are not required to keep their engines running, which causes excess fuel emissions.

"The temporary suspension and the anticipated regulation of sulphur fuel, which needs to happen urgently, are both welcome steps," Leichhardt Mayor Rochelle Porteous said in a statement.

"However, ship to shore-based power must be retrofitted as soon as possible and noise mitigation addressed."

Mayor Porteous said the community had suffered significant impacts.

"Putting cruise ships with their engines running, invasive noise and diesel fumes belched out across the peninsula just next door to family homes was always going to have significant impacts," she said.

A spokeswoman from the NSW Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) said it has been working with local residents to remedy concerns about emissions from cruise ships.

"The sulphur content used in shipping fuels is higher than allowed for other types of fuels in NSW and we recognise that reducing the sulphur content of fuel reduces impacts on air quality," she said in a statement.

No air quality monitoring at White Bay

There is no current air quality monitoring conducted in the White Bay area since the NSW Port Authority removed monitoring stations in July 2014.

Air quality monitoring that demonstrated compliance was undertaken by the Port Authority of NSW as part of the planning approval requirement and was completed in July 2014.

"Despite meeting the relevant air quality criteria the EPA has long recognised and advocated the benefits of reducing the sulphur content of fuel," a NSW EPA spokeswoman said.

But a parliamentary inquiry has since recommended that the EPA immediately approach the National Environment Protection Council to request a review of the air pollution limits, which were the point of reference for the pollution limits set under the White Bay project approval.

More should have been done to mitigate impacts: inquiry

The findings of NSW Upper House parliamentary inquiry into the performance of the NSW EPA were released in February.

The inquiry found that the EPA should have done more to ensure that the planning and assessment process for the terminal took into consideration "the full and likely impact of the relocation of the terminal to White Bay".



PHOTO: Ocean liners will be prevented from docking overnight at the terminal at Balmain until the State Government regulates low-sulphur fuel use in the harbour. (Facebook: Robert Michael Peacock)

MAP: Balmain 2041



PHOTO: The Leichhardt Council said the terminal also needed to be fitted with shore-based power so ships are not required to keep their engines running. (Facebook: Friends of White Bay)

The findings stated that while the EPA failed to anticipate the magnitude of impacts experienced by residents, it was also acknowledged that the EPA was working within the regulatory parameters set to achieve some progress for the residents of Balmain.

Noise and pollution limits for the shipping industry are not set by the EPA, but by an "international and state-based regulatory framework".

'Limited opportunity for compliance or enforcement'

The parliamentary inquiry findings acknowledged the EPA was unable to intervene to some extent because "although noise and pollution from the terminal has impacted on residents, ships have generally operated within the limits set by the project approval, leaving limited opportunity for compliance or enforcement activity".

The NSW EPA said on Thursday it was working closely with the community of White Bay in an effort to resolve the issue of emissions from cruise ships and that it has been advocating for a fast solution.

"The NSW EPA considers that the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from ships (MARPOL) 2020 Timetable to reduce sulphur content in fuels is too far off for communities impacted by shipping emissions such as at White Bay," she said.

The spokeswoman said the NSW EPA had been advocating for the shipping industry to move quickly towards a solution, "especially given the world's best practice is currently being met in North America."

In a statement, NSW Environment Minister Mark Speakman said from July 1 2016 cruise ships in all NSW ports would be required to use fuel with a sulphur content of 0.1 per cent or less.

"In addition, the Government is on target to have an interim low sulphur regulation in place for the start of the next cruise season for cruise ships berthing in Sydney," he said.

Topics: pollution, community-and-society, environmental-impact, balmain-2041, leichhardt-2040

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PHOTO: There is no current air quality monitoring conducted in the White Bay area.
(Facebook: Robert Michael Peacock)