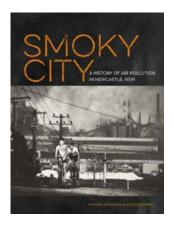
## **Book Review**

## Dr Mark Goldstone

Smoky City: A history of air pollution in Newcastle, NSW

By Howard Bridgman and Nancy Cushing Published by Hunter Press, AU\$29.95, ISBN: 978 0 9924885 2 9



When I first migrated from the United Kingdom to take up a role with Main Roads Western Australia, there were two phenomena, which I found truly strange in the move from England to Australia. These were:

- 1) The lack of any clear control on motor vehicle emissions Australia had no estimate of emissions from vehicles and no means of testing them. By contrast, after three years from new, each year everyone in the United Kingdom would submit their vehicles to a Ministry of Transport test from a vehicle condition safety check, which included a test on emissions. Should the vehicle fail any part of that test then the owner would be required to repair it before paying to have it re-tested. Whether you could afford it or not was not in question, so as a young poor family we were required to wreck a vehicle that had simply failed the oil rings. It was a smoky vehicle and we learned to use public transport until such time as we could purchase a new (second hand) ford escort. From this test data it was possible to build an emissions database from the fleet of vehicles on the road (known as the Park) and track the changes the might occur through the introduction of new emissions controls.
- 2) The Clean Air Act introduced in the Late 1950s and early 1960s required all households to move to smokeless fuels. There were no exceptions and I well remember the financial hardship that we faced in moving from coal to gas/electricity. So, to find Australians using wood burning as a means of space heating was a complete shock, couldn't imagine how any advanced Westernised society could be using a form of space heating that was so primitive.

Whilst at Main Roads (1995-1995) I travelled to a conference in New South Wales where the CSIRO and NSW EPA had undertaken their

first in-use inspection and maintenance testing and I queried why this not part of a mandatory annual test. I was very firmly told that the Australian People would not accept such a regulation and that it would adversely affect those in the lower socio-economic group.

However, Australia still struggles with an ongoing problem – in the last NEPC report (2012-13), the NSW EPA in their annual report to NEPC noted that much of the PM2.5 pollution they measured at came from wood burning in the Richmond and Liverpool Street Sites and they were unsure whether they could meet any tightening of the PM2.5 standard into the future. (http://www.scew.gov.au/resource/nepc-annual-report-2012-13.)

This historical book helped me to understand the divergence in environmental psychology between Australia and the United Kingdom. Throughout most of the chapters that are rich with historical photographs, the authors focus on the point sources of industrial emissions and provide estimates of emissions according to the National Pollutant Inventory (NPI) workbooks, but only for PM10, not PM2.5. Throughout the first 7 chapters, which are replete with carefully selected and informative historical photographs, show the rise of coal mining and the then introduction of steel making and the rise of rail and shipping followed by the loss and rise of steel making, and its visual impact on point source industrial emissions.

It is only in the eighth and ninth chapters, as they begin to look at PM2.5, that the authors start to discuss the divergence of ideas between those who want to make air pollution an industrial problem and those in the community who are beginning to see that they too have a role in improving Australia's National Clean Air.

I found this book both educational and enriching and recommend it for those who love history and want to think about where we as a Nation head next in regards to controlling our air quality.

Smoky City is available for purchase online at www.hunterpress. com.au