



National probe into traffic tunnel health risks

By Sean Parnell
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- **Air quality concerns force major review**
- **Expert panel to establish safe exposure limits**
- **Quick Vote: Are you worried about pollution levels?**

TONY Abbott has ordered the peak medical research body to investigate road tunnels, fearing people's health has been put at risk by the states' response to population growth and traffic congestion.

Amid a continued debate in NSW, Queensland and to a lesser extent Victoria over the financial viability of tunnels in their respective capital cities, the federal Health Minister has instructed the **National Health and Medical Research Council** to consider the human toll of such projects and whether tougher regulation is needed.

 **Are you worried about pollution levels in and around road tunnels. Tell us your experiences below.**

A spokeswoman said Mr Abbott was behind the NHMRC's renewed interest in traffic pollution.

"I understand that Minister Abbott has received numerous expressions of concern about the issue of air quality around traffic tunnels in Sydney and Melbourne and sees it as his responsibility to ask Australia's peak medical research group to investigate," she said.

The NHMRC is understood to have obtained initial data on the problem, focusing on levels of nitrogen dioxide, carbon monoxide, photochemical oxidants, sulphur dioxide, lead and particulate matter.

The NHMRC has gathered an expert panel to analyse the data as it seeks to establish suitable exposure limits and possibly develop standards for air quality around tunnels.

The move is likely to open another front in the battle between the commonwealth and the states over infrastructure and development controls, particularly when the Howard Government is facing pressure to fund more roads.

The CSIRO last year discovered emissions figures used by tunnel planners underestimated pollution levels. Sydney tunnels had emissions up to 100 per cent greater than estimated at the design phase.

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Health risk? ... traffic in Melbourne's Burnley Tunnel / File

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