



# Session Report

## Neutrog Community Reference Panel

17<sup>th</sup> November 2025

democracyCo

# Background

Neutrog, with the support of local independent facilitation company DemocracyCo have set up the Neutrog Community Reference Panel (the Panel) to provide ongoing feedback on how Neutrog can meet the expectations of residents and businesses in the community.

The Panel will help Neutrog to continue to provide economic opportunities in the Hills, while minimising odour, dust and fire risk.

## About the Panel

The Panel is made up of a diverse mix of approximately 10 community members including residents, community group representatives, staff, suppliers, and representatives from local government. Importantly, the panel members all have different lived experiences of Neutrog and their operations, and therefore will be vital to ensure accurate, balanced and agreed-upon feedback can be reflected to Neutrog. Initially the panel will be focused on providing specific feedback to Neutrog on the areas of fire and air quality, with the intention to form meaningful actions for Neutrog. Once these sessions are complete, we hope Panel members will continue to meet over the next two years to provide ongoing feedback, creating an important mechanism for transparency and sustained communication between the community and Neutrog.

The Panel is being facilitated by DemocracyCo using deliberative and co-design engagement methods which ensure constructive, respectful, and productive conversations.

## About this Report

After every meeting of the Panel a report from that session will be produced – this is that Report. This report seeks to provide a summary overview of the

- The process the Panel went through in this session,
- what was discussed by the Panel,
- speakers and what they talked about.

# Session 2

17<sup>th</sup> November 2025

## Overview of Process

The third session of the Panel saw the commencement of the Panels focus on Air Quality (Odour and Dust). The question the Panel are considering is 'what would give them confidence that Neutrog was doing everything they can to reduce odour and dust. The session was largely focused on hearing from speakers with a small amount of deliberation on the Panels hopes and worries, and starting work on articulating their Air Quality objectives.

## Our Speakers

The Panel was joined by three speakers:

1. John Maguire – a local Mental Health Advocate – speaking about the mental health impacts of issues such as those being experienced by the local community
2. Johan Meline from SLR Consulting – an Odour expert who covered:
  - a. Odour sources and dispersion pathways
  - b. How odour is perceived
  - c. Odour assessment / measurement methodologies
  - d. Assessment criteria
  - e. Odour descriptors – intensity
  - f. Odour descriptors – character
3. Hazel Ashby from Neutrog who discussed:
  - a. EPA licencing conditions in regard to Dust Prevention, Odour Management Plan, Odour Prevention, Staged Environment Improvement Programme the Complaints register and Approval of operating processes and approval of works.
  - b. Neutrog reporting summaries from the EPA.
  - c. Neutrog odour report logs – received directly.
  - d. Odour complaints by year
  - e. Odour complaints by location
  - f. What a 'good' odour report looks like
  - g. Actions Neutrog are currently taking to address odour.
  - h. Why can't Neutrog just move.

Speaker videos and presentations are posted on the DemocracyCo website.

# Discussion Themes

The Panel began the evening by outlining the Hopes and Worries they have about Air Quality (Odour and Dust).

## Our Hopes:

- Community and Neutrog co-exist.
  - o That the community and Neutrog can coexist
  - o Movement in approach by Neutrog and community
  - o Reduce complaints.
  - o Coexistence (between the Kanmantoo community and Neutrog)
  - o When the Mayor of Mt Barker doorknocked during his campaign 70% of the people he spoke to indicated they want the “Neutrog problem fixed”.
  - o Can there be community satisfaction?
- Right to breathe clean air
  - o A united nation determined in 2022 that all people have a right to breathe clean air.
- New technologies
  - o There is a solution out there!
  - o Neutrog consider new technologies to resolve issues – nothing changes if nothing changes.
- Honesty and transparency
- Dust and odour are managed
  - o Dust and odour are managed in accordance with the EPA license
  - o Significantly less odour
  - o Minimal dust outside of crazy weather events
- Complaints should be registered (especially when one person is responsible for many events)
  - o Complaints need to be registered so that duplicates are identified.

## Our Worries:

- Health impacts
  - o Dust in eyes and lungs.
  - o Health concerns regarding odour
  - o Health impacts
  - o Are we safe?
  - o For over 30 years, Neutrog has deprived the community of the right to breathe clean air.
- Property values decreasing as a result of nothing changing or the air quality issue becoming worse.
- Impacts on enjoyment
  - o Sometimes there is no ability to use outside spaces.
  - o Putrid stench
- Community want Neutrog to move.
  - o Worry that ‘Neutrog moving’ is all the community wants them to do.
  - o This is non-negotiable
- Normal country smells are being exaggerated.
- Transparency of reporting
  - o Hundreds of reports are being made to the EPA, but not by hundreds of people.
  - o Only a select group reporting A LOT

# Reflections following speakers

In the last 30mins of the Panel session, the Panel built on the hopes and worries and started discussing what they think the objectives should be for Neutrog in regard to Air Quality (Odour and Dust).

This reflection used a '4F' approach – facts, feelings, findings and future:

Facts: "What did you hear?"

Feelings: "What reactions did it evoke?"

Findings: "What key insights do we all need to remember from what we have learnt tonight? What does this mean for us?"

Future: "What should our air quality objectives (or outcomes) be"

DemocracyCo facilitators documented the Findings and Future (only), and they are below:

## Findings:

- Lifestyle and comfort at home is impacted by odour.
- Odour intensity is subjective and means different things to different people.
  - Odour intensity is hard to quantify.
- Odour is a big issue for a lot of people.
  - Is it a public health issue?
  - Is there a direct correlation between health and the organic materials i.e. is it just a smell or is it impacting the health of populations?
- How to match the science of modelling with perceptions
  - We need data to prove/disprove if odour is impacting health.
- Neutrog is already doing things to monitor and manage odour. This needs to be mapped out so the community can see what's being done
  - This includes timelines of when certain measures were implemented and if they had any impact.
  - Relates to honesty and transparency
- Neutrog gets so many bad reports because only the people who are impacted negatively are the ones who report. This means that Neutrog is never notified when the odour problem is lessened or better.
- This is not an imaginary problem – many people are affected by Neutrog.
- This is not going to be a quick fix
- Trust and transparency takes (and will take Neutrog) a long time to build
  - Want to see more commitment from Neutrog staff to be here to listen to us

## Future:

- Neutrog could provide the community with a “good” example of an odour report, highlighting the pieces of information that are vital for them to know (location, time, identifying factor etc)
  - This helps the community to give Neutrog feedback
  - This could also include making Neutrog’s monitoring reports available to the community
- It is important for Neutrog to try everything they can to try and implement solutions and improve their operations
- Everyone needs to be on the same page:
  - Have access to the same information about Odour- such as we heard from Johan – specifically about how odour is perceived differently by different people, how it is assessed and measured and also that there are character and intensity variations.
  - Have access to information about Neutrog’s licence conditions and industry standards (and if they are meeting / not meeting them) , research and scientific findings. This should also include legislation, science, and lived experiences – perhaps this could be done through the EIP?
- Communities breathe clean air
- Honesty, transparency and openness
  - Communication is open and regular
  - Explore / replicate the K4C model that Hillgrove has implemented
  - Neutrog need social licence to operate.
- As a business, Neutrog must exhaust all means to find the best solutions to continue to reduce odour and dust
  - In an environmentally sustainable way
  - By adopting modern practices
  - Using existing technology
  - Exploring innovation/emerging technology
  - Exploring new product development (aka Chockablock)
- Neutrog is a leader in composting
  - Best practice benchmarking
- Supported improvement
  - The EPA need to support Neutrog better in order for them to have any sort of improvement.

## Follow-up questions

The Panel asked a question which has been referred to Johan Meline for follow-up: How many people are involved in the monitoring of odour when it happens? How many noses?

## Decisions

There were no decisions taken by the Panel during this session.

# Next Steps

The Panel will spend Session 4 completing their advice on Air Quality (Odour and Dust).

The Panel has agreed to a fifth session to a) finalise its work on Fire (due to not having a quorum on Session 2), b) finalise its Air Quality recommendations and c) provide advice to Neutrog regarding the broad engagement planned for early 2026.

# More Information

To find out more information visit

- DemocracyCo project website - <https://www.democracyco.com.au/whats-on/neutrog-community-reference-panel/>
- Neutrog's Community Portal - <https://neutrogcommunityportal.com.au/>