

SUSTAINABILITY OF ENERGY SUPPLY AND RESOURCES IN NSW

Organisation: Northern Lakes Disability Tourism Precinct

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Legislative Assembly

5th August 2019

Committee on Environment and Planning

Parliament of New South Wales

Macquarie Street Sydney NSW 2000

Inquiry into sustainability of energy supply and resources in N.S.W.

Dear Chairperson,

My name is Gary Blaschke OAM, a resident of Lake Munmorah since 2009 and an active Environmentalist for over three decades. Receiving the Order of Australia medal for my ongoing dedication to the Disabled and Environment in 2007 & having chaired many N.G.O.'s such as the Botany Bay and Catchment Alliance Inc. & South West Enviro Centre Inc. plus standing before several Commissions of Inquiry and Planning Panels.

As Hon. National President of the Disabled Surfers Association of Australia Inc. for over thirty three years, my only responsibility is making sure the most profoundly disabled people in which we give a safe and happy surfing experience are not exposed to any man made external impacts from poor management of infrastructure, culminating in contaminated creeks, rivers and onto our ocean, our office.

EFFECTS ON REGIONAL COMMUNITIES, WATER SUPPLY, THE ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC HEALTH:

Sustainability is the ability to exist constantly by the capacity for the biosphere and human civilisations to exist, a balanced environment in which we all can live safely. The regions of the Northern Central Coast and lower Lake Macquarie have experienced many impacts to that balance over the past six decades and many independent studies indicate it is not getting any better. In fact many of the impacts are systematically covered up or if discovered in most cases a minimal fine is applied.

The recent Hunter Community Environment Centre Inc. "Out of the Ashes" report, Environmental Justice Australia's "Unearthing Australia's toxic coal ash legacy", Torrens University's finding of a four year Cancer Cluster report on the Central Coast revealing the region to be more than 6% above the N.S.W. average with nine different cancers, yet local authorities and health leaders write it off simply as a lower socio-economic area where more people smoke. I still have not received any answer to why two preschoolers at Chain Valley Bay are currently suffering from Brain Cancer and two fourteen year old friends who grew up in the

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region, passed away nine months apart from Spinal tumours, even though none had started smoking or their parents.

The entire region has been subject to the pressures of having three of N.S.W.'s major power stations, Lake Munmorah, Vales Point and Eraring, several coal mines and the damming legacies they leave without any indication of complete remediation of sites from operators or government.

Recent approval of the Wallarah 2 Coal mine by the N.S.W. State Government has put the Central Coast's water supply in jeopardy. It will reduce bushland corridors with a coal loading facility being constructed only metres from the township of Blue Haven and others. This will allow the continuation of delivering coal to Newcastle by rail, further jeopardising the health of tens of thousands of residents.

Mine subsidence riddles the entire region with television ads regularly warning of sink holes and until only recently due to a review by the Mine Subsidence Board, many of the regions have suspiciously & remarkably been omitted from the Mine Subsidence regions. My own home ten years ago had to have approval from the Subsidence Board. Five years ago my mother's Granny flat had to have approval, yet only months ago we were notified that we no longer live in a Mine Subsidence area.

The existing unused mines have not been filled in, in fact further mine approvals have been granted with tokenistic Community consultation taking place, yet the wider community still left in the dark with the authorities unwilling to hold true community consultation.

The bi-product of burning Coal is Fly Ash which is quickly becoming the regions major environmental and human health issue. Whilst two of the three power stations will continue to produce the ash for at least a further decade, two of the ash dams (Vales Point & Eraring) are quickly becoming a N.S.W. Government nightmare.

The sale of Vales Point power station for the massively deflated amount of one million dollars to Sunset International Pty Ltd, trading as Delta Electricity defies why a complete inquiry was not conducted for the sale alone & not just the fine print in the sales contract which effectively puts the responsibility of remediation back onto the Government, if or when Sunset International decide to pull the pin.

Amounts of over \$400 million dollars being the new value of the site at Vales Point, even after Howards Recycling the preferred operator of the site was found guilty of mixing large amounts of Asbestos into the so called clean fill being delivered from the North Connex tunnel project,

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yet again the N.S.W. Environmental Protection Authority have shown their incompetence in simply protecting the environment & the local communities.

The Vales Point & Eraring ash dams are over fifty five years old, unlined and showing signs of fatigue, yet other authorities like the Dams Safety Committee are reluctant to investigate or do anything about the dams.

It is widely known that the N.S.W. Sports department had closed down the Myuna Bay Recreational Camp due to concerns of possible earthquake activity impacting on the walls of the Eraring dam which is larger than that of Vales Point. The local community have not been given any explanation regarding their safety or the continual use of main roads in the same proximity, even though the investigation of the closure of the camp has recently been found warranted.

I am asking why then if an earthquake is an issue for Eraring ash dam, why isn't it an issue for Vales Point? Only 14.4 km as the crow flies or 19.0 km by road between both ash dams, surely any earthquake could have devastating consequences for surrounding townships from both dams?

Vales Point ash dam is equivalent to over 455 Olympic swimming pools in size or equivalent to one and a half of the size of Sydney's Centennial Park. Eraring ash dam is slightly larger with both emitting a toxic sludge of heavy metals including mercury, lead, arsenic, selenium and chromium into local creeks and then onto Lake Macquarie during high rain periods.

Previous final compliance reports for Vales Point alone have found that PH samples exceeded the specified range, water levels in the dam were not being managed efficiently, so as to minimise or prevent the pollution of surface water. It also found that secondary containment and or other management systems was not in place for the return water tank, some plant and equipment was not being maintained in a proper and efficient condition. Furthermore that approved methods for analysing water samples were not being used by the licensee's laboratory and not all required information was contained in the licensee's pollution incident response management report. Not a glowing report for the operators or those who were overseeing the operations such as the E.P.A. Hardly convincing or heart warming for those living in the region.

The N.S.W. Government does not have a good record when it comes to toxic sites. Ones that come to mind and that I had some input into are the entire Sydney Olympic site including Homebush Bay and the Rhodes Peninsula being half remediated and then capped with

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concrete. Another being the Southern Hemispheres second largest groundwater toxic plume of Ethylene dichloride on the old ICI site at Botany, which was inherited by Orica. Other issue on the site is the massive storage of Hexachlorobenzene and leakage of mercury through two local creeks into Botany Bay.

Closer to my home, issues like the illegal landfill tip at Mangrove Mountain and Spencer on the Central Coast. The local authorities including Goford Council & the E.P.A. totally knew of what was happening and chose to turn a blind eye, until busted. The outcomes of previous Government inquiries, Commissions of Inquiry and EPA reports, do nothing for my confidence in this inquiry or others.

The decommissioning of the former Lake Munmorah Power Station has the community wondering who is on their side. In September 2017, I received a phone call from Holly Love (Sydney EPA) telling me of the finding of PFAS in Lake Munmorah and Colongra Bay. Some two years later the excuse for no test results was that they could not catch any fish or prawns and therefore could not do any studies. Further pressure was put on the EPA in December 2018 and within weeks they had caught five species of fish, had them tested and put out a media release stating "Tuggerah Lakes given all clear after PFAS testing". Their Media Release also noted the general advice from Food Standards Australia and New Zealand, which is to limit seafood consumption to 2-3 serves a week as part of a balanced diet, yet this only adds to the community's concerns.

Issues of dumped asbestos have been denied by [REDACTED], plus areas within the site and surrounding bushlands having not self revegetated after many years being one of the answers we require. The community is not aware of the Government's intention for the site in the long term, yet do believe it will become just another of the regional housing estates.

The general community has no faith in the Governments processes. For example the expansion of Port Botany Terminal Commission of Inquiry had three Commissioners' find that the project should not go ahead or at least be one third of the proposed size, the N.S.W. Government just totally overrode their findings after tens of millions of dollars of taxpayer money was wasted. The construction of the Port Enfield Intermodal facility is just another result of Government enquiries not taking any notice of community complaints.

Time after time, the community does its homework, writes submissions, stands before hearings and rarely gets a response, notably only after the Government approves the development.

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The regional community understands that power stations & coal mines have added to the states economy and supplied jobs for those living in close proximity, yet at what ongoing cost to the environment and human health.

Dr, Ben Ewald's B.Med., PhD very recent findings, "The health burden of fine particle pollution from electricity generation in N.S.W." has supported reports and studies in the region for several decades.

Similar findings of the Workers Inquiry into the Wollongong Leukaemia and Cancer Crisis in September 1997, because the N.S.W. Government felt they knew better or didn't listen to the community. The findings found a staggering number of leukaemia and lymphoma deaths among former Warrawong High School students. BHP the owners of the Port Kembla copper smelter and other major companies are responsible for the rising leukaemia and cancer toll.

Further finding had the report prepared by the Illawarra Public Health Unit was a whitewash, organised by the Labor government to protect the interests of the companies involved. Political responsibility for years of official cover-ups lies with the Labor and trade union leaders.

The regional health and destruction of the environment is and will become a major political nightmare for this and future governments, yet it is obvious that the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing.

The recently released Central Coast Regional Plan 2036 identifies some 40,500 new homes to be constructed over the following twenty years. This plan culminates with over a further 101,000 new residents, in the same proximity as the power stations and their ash dams. Along with this disaster, the report also indicates a further \$180 Million worth of mineral extractions per annum in amongst those residential developments.

The offshoot to the Regional Plan is the first of many for the region, that being the Structure Plan Greater Lake Munmorah with its lies and deception. Raising this plan is the Government's way of presenting digestible size developments, yet not telling the regional community of their plans for further development within the region.

The transition to renewable energy that has limited impact on the regions Health and Environment is the way forward, yet many answers are not forthcoming from all levels of government. In fact Central Coast Council and local members of Parliament have been reluctant to become involved in any way. Councillors saying they have a conflict of interest, as they work

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for Delta, yet they also have a conflict of interest for not protecting their constituents that voted for them.

Air pollution is not seen as an issue, yet Asthma is an ongoing issue for our younger generation. Respiratory issues are continuing to rise and whilst Sunset International P/L are allowed to self monitor and only one official EPA monitor on the Central Coast is some twelve kilometres from the power station, the community will have no faith in the Government's findings. The upper Hunter has 14 official EPA monitors, lower Hunter has 6, Sydney has 25, the Illawarra has 8 and the Central Coast has 1.

Legal action pending by local landholders for contamination and leaching of toxins are current. There is enough evidence of massive Human Health and Environmental impacts over many years, yet the so called authorities continue with the head in the sand attitude to the detriment of our communities.

THE CAPACITY AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES OF RENEWABLE ENERGY:

Sunset International P/L has had approval for a tokenistic Solar Farm on part of the Vales Point Ash Dam. One community meeting failed to indicate exactly how this project had any benefit to the community, in fact it raised questions to the construction process of concreting over the fly ash and hoping it just goes away.

Complete remediation is the only way the community will allow any further development of both Vales Point and Eraring ash dams. After the remediation, a substantial trial area of Carbon Capture forests to be planted with ongoing monitoring of the effect on reducing the threats to the environment and human health, as an offset to the loss of biodiversity and damage already experienced. The site should not be seen as Carbon Credits and also should be legislated for future use as a study area for University graduates & others. Potential tourism and a good will gesture from all involved.

The government has an obsession with using such terms as "Sustainable" & "Affordable" and fails to understand the real meaning or at least has its own interpretation. The approval of a Carbon Capture forest would generate jobs of many kinds and allow long term study areas setting a precedent and maybe answering many of the questions that have evaded the community for generations.

Considering both Eraring and Vales Point power stations have a minimum of a decade of further operation, it is now time to look and plan ahead to having a neutral impact on the regions health.

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EMERGING TRENDS IN ENERGY SUPPLY AND EXPORT, INCLUDING INVESTMENT AND OTHER FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:

Not only has the N.S.W. government earmarked the Central Coast and lower Lake Macquarie region for horrific & unsustainable housing developments due to its poor planning practices for Sydney, they are also willing to extract further massive resources within designated housing estates as per the C.C.R.P. 2036.

To its credit the N.S.W. government has banned Gas fracking on the Central Coast, yet the sleeping giant although is the Federal Government's obsession with seismic testing off our coastline looking for both oil and gas with the potential of rigs off our beaches, a double whammy for the region.

The total ignorance and poor leadership from the Prime Minister to Recourse Minister Matthew Canavan MP is very apparent. The assurance of the credibility of the National Offshore Petroleum Safety & Environment Management Authority (N.O.P.S.E.M.A.) has fallen on deaf community ears, as major conflicts of interest remain with all board members either working for or having a long term working relationship with both Gas & Oil companies.

Confirmation from my local Federal Member Pat Conroy MP has indicated that I need not worry about the Central Coast, as the proposed AGL facility is to be situated in the Hunter close to the Newcastle gas storage facility, possibly around Tomago, this confirming the Federal Government's intentions for the region.

There are many emerging trends, yet the communities most impacted upon are usually the last to know. Tokenistic public meetings or even the occasional Inquiry or hearing, does nothing for the confidence of the community to trust our elected leaders or bureaucrats. It is quite obvious that the region is and has always been the sacrificial lamb for developers wanting to exploit the region and all levels of government support their aspirations.

Investments and financial arrangements certainly favour those from over seas or those only looking at the fiscal outcomes. The externalities that are always ignored by all levels of government or developers are those that local communities have to live with every day.

It is not up to local communities to come up with the answers to sustainable energy supply, yet it is the responsibility of those we elect and the experts they employ to have looked beyond their noses to see that they have failed to look beyond coal burning and advance Australia without impacting on the community or the environment.

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No such plans have been presented, except for tokenistic solar farms or hydro schemes, the argument for Nuclear power which has many negative externalities or refurbishment of coal fired generators well beyond their lifespan. This surely indicates that all authorities have been derelict in their duty to take Australia into a cleaner and much more sustainable future for following generations.

THE STATUS OF AND FORECASTS FOR ENERGY AND RESOURCE MARKETS:

The general consensus by the Australian community is that renewable sources of energy are preferred, with a measured transition from coal fired power stations, once base lines are secure.

The latest markets (ABS) show that seasonally adjusted mineral exploration rose by 3.9%, yet generally mineral exploration fell by 16.1%, exploration of new deposits fell 24.6% & expenditure on existing deposits also fell by 10.5%. Metres drilled fell 12.0%, petroleum exploration expenditure fell 10/3%, leases fell 13.8% and as a total, petroleum exploration fell by 27.1% .

Therefore this could indicate that the writing is on the wall and that the science and public opinion is against exploiting most mineral resources, especially to the detriment of the Environment and general Health of nearby communities.

SUMMARY:

No matter where one lives, how big or small ones home is or how rich one becomes, the common denominator is our health and wellbeing. The Central Coast, Lake Macquarie and Hunter regions have long been exploited for mineral extraction and the burning of fossil fuels for generation of electricity for the rest of the country.

We have endured the long term impacts on our health and on our amazing environment, yet without any foresight from all levels of government, surrounding communities continue to be impacted upon without any indication of a reprieve.

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The supply of sustainable energy and resources is an issue that all communities strive for, but not at the expense of their health or loss of their environment. It is clear that many living outside of the areas impacted upon by coal fired power stations do not understand the immense detrimental impacts they have on local communities & the entire region.

The Northern Lakes Disability Tourism Precinct Committee Inc. has work tirelessly to improve the region as a holiday destination for the disabled. We have instigated and physically built beach access ways, carried out access audits in local shopping centres & for Council holiday parks. The introduction of Disability Fishing, Surfing & Sailing programs indicate the region has massive potential for Disability Tourism.

Camp Breakaway a local respite accommodation facility has been established for over thirty five years and the approval of lifts at the local railway station Wyee, is testimony to where the region is heading thus having massive ash dams and burning coal is not the answer for hundreds of thousands new residents and visitors to our region.

I therefore request the opportunity to address the Inquiry into sustainability of energy supply and resources in N.S.W., to inform the Legislative Assembly's Environment and Planning Committee of the local's perspective on these and other related matters.

Yours sincerely,

Gary Blaschke

Gary Blaschke OAM

N.L.D.T.P.C. Inc. President

