

**Submission  
No 150**

## **SUSTAINABILITY OF ENERGY SUPPLY AND RESOURCES IN NSW**

**Organisation:** Samaritans

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# Samaritans

*Compassion Integrity Justice*



## **NSW Legislative Assembly, Committee on Environment and Planning, inquiry into Sustainability of energy supply and resources in NSW**

**Prepared by Samaritans Foundation**

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## Introduction

Samaritans is a non-government organisation operating services across many areas of the social sector. In the 2019 financial year, Samaritans provided services to thousands of people in areas including disability support, homelessness, emergency relief, child, youth and family services, gambling and financial counselling and mental health, among others. Samaritans has been operating for 35 years and currently provides services in Newcastle, the Hunter, Central Coast and Mid-North Coast of NSW.

Samaritans submission to this inquiry is specifically related to item 5 of the Terms of Reference, 'Opportunities to support sustainable economic development in regional and other communities likely to be affected by changing energy and resource markets, including the role of government policies'.

Samaritans provides services to a region in which coal mining plays a significant role in the economic and social fabric of the community. The impact of the economic transition resulting from these changing markets will be keenly felt by the people living in these communities.

In making this submission, Samaritans notes the following:

- We accept the scientific evidence of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) that the climate is warming, and that human activity is the primary cause of this increase.
- We support the aims of the Paris Agreement to hold the increase in global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts towards limiting it to 1.5°C.
- We accept the view of the IPCC that to achieve the full ambition of the Paris commitments will require a transition to net-zero emissions of greenhouse gases by mid-century.
- We acknowledge the risks of this transition to the community, particularly in regional areas such as the Hunter, which has an economic reliance on the coal industry, and which will suffer

significant social and economic costs if the transition is not managed appropriately.

### **Climate is Good, Coal is Bad**

In our time working with vulnerable communities, we have seen a dramatic increase in the use of ‘othering’ in the public discourse. Othering means to view or treat (a person or group of people) as intrinsically different from and alien to oneself.

Whether it be welfare recipients, people with disability, those who are homeless, immigrants, or LGBTQI+ people, the use of othering has been a tool used to shape and influence public opinion. As an agency that values the intrinsic human rights of all people, we have attempted to bring a human face to any public discussion so that people focus on our common humanity.

During the 2019 Federal election campaign, the impact of othering in respect of the issues of climate change, renewable energy, and coal mining was brought into stark relief. Activities such as the Stop Adani convoy led to physical clashes in Clermont, Queensland, and counter-rallies including one in Mackay, Queensland, led by the CFMEU and attended by politicians from the Liberal National Party and One Nation.

The impact of the polarisation of the debate was expressed on the evening of the election by Liberal Senator, the Hon Arthur Sinodinos AO, who said “The Bob Brown caravan which went up there to talk about stopping Adani, had the effect of making a lot of locals say 'hang on, you are not going to tell us how to live'.”

Our interest in this matter relates back to the impact of such public discourse on the families in these communities and the potential impact this will have on their ability to engage in the economic transition resulting from changing energy and resource markets.

### The Social Impact of Transition

Samaritans is mindful of making generalised statements in relation to its observations and fears for the communities of the Hunter. There is limited research literature that directly considers the impact of energy transition on coal mining communities. However, Della Bosca and Gillespie (2018) makes a valuable contribution to the discussion and has provided some evidence for the concerns that we have.

Their paper defines generational coal mining communities (GCMCs) as “communities in which coal mining has played a central role in the economic, cultural, social, and physical development of a township or region over many generations”.

Coal mining in Australia started in Newcastle in 1801. Coal mining in the Northern District Coalfields of NSW has a long history dating back to 1817 when the government first started mining operations in the area. This was accelerated by the formation in 1824 of the Australian Agricultural Company (AAC). For almost 220 years, coal mining has been embedded in the fabric of the communities of the Hunter, clearly assigning them the status of a GCMC.

Our concerns about the impact of othering is reflected in the work of Della Bosca and Gillespie, who note “Framings of energy justice are innately political, constructed, and contested, with many energy transition initiatives assigning blame in the process of identifying solutions.”

They go on to further explain the implications of this to communities, stating “the ‘jobs versus environment’ narrative which tends to characterise decarbonisation discourse simultaneously undermines energy transition initiatives” and goes on to outline the evidence for this in greater detail.

There is a particular statement that gives voice to our concerns about the impact of transition on the social fabric of GCMCS: “Current transition discourse suggests that mining heritage is largely not valued by wider

society; as we can see from environmental activism that links morality to decarbonisation, demonising coal and all its attendant enablers is an intentional strategy.”

The social cohesion of communities is essential to providing all its members with access to opportunity and prosperity. It is our view that a discourse that continually divides communities will result in a range of negative outcomes, including a scenario where members of GCMCs aren’t able to engage with new industries arising from the economic transition.

This is also considered by the World Bank (2018) where it notes, “Furthermore, coal miners can have a very strong identity with their community – with successive generations of workers working in the coal mines, which can result in very tight-knit communities so that redundant workers may be reluctant to relocate their families to find work in other locations”.

Again, Della Bosca and Gillespie highlight the evidence for this in their research, and it is not our intention to revisit this in detail. However, there are salient lessons for the NSW Government to consider in how it manages the social transition that will inevitably accompany an economic transition.

They also point to the role of the coal industry in reinforcing the social cohesion of the community through support of charitable causes. This is another area of social transition that cannot be overlooked.

In the NSW Mining Industry Expenditure Impact Survey 2017/18, produced by the Minerals Council (2019), the NSW mining sector funded \$7.3 million in community contributions. In the Hunter, this represented \$3.5 million in contributions to 375 community organisations across a range of areas including health, sport, and social services.

In economic transitions, particularly as this will involve newer and potentially less financially mature organisations, there is a risk that this valuable

contribution will diminish. This threatens the financial viability of the community organisations that rely upon this philanthropy to survive, and thereby impacting on the role they play in maintaining social cohesion.

It is noted that current NSW Government planning documents, including the Hunter Regional Plan 2036 (2016), the Upper Hunter Economic Diversification Project Action Plan (2017), and the Upper Hunter Economic Diversification Action Plan: Implementation Priorities (2018), do not specifically address the issue of social transition alongside economic transition.

### **Recommendation**

1. Samaritans recommends that the Inquiry recognises the importance of social transition alongside economic transition and prioritises activities that will ensure all community members can engage in this transition, including the inclusion of social transition as a specific objective in NSW Government planning documents.

## **Honour the past, share in the future**

It is argued by Della Bosca and Gillespie, that one way of supporting social transition, or removing resistance to change, is through “exploring ways in which the intangible associations with place – identity, attachment – can be maintained at the community level”.

For the benefit of the Inquiry, Samaritans has identified in its consultation a range of international exemplars of how the heritage of GCMCs has been honoured while the region makes an economic transition away from coal.

These include:

- The town of Loos-en-Gohelle in the north of France. This former mining community features two enormous spoil heaps that dominate its landscape and form part of the mines of the Nord-Pas de Calais region that have become the 38th French site on the list of UNESCO World



Heritage Sites as "a living and changing landscape".

<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1360>

- The Zollverein Coal Mine Industrial Complex (German Zeche Zollverein) is a large former industrial site in the city of Essen, North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany. It has been inscribed into the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites since December 14, 2001 and is one of the anchor points of the European Route of Industrial Heritage.

<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/975>

- The South Wales Miners' Museum is a museum of the coal mining industry and its workforce in the South Wales Coalfield.

<https://www.south-wales-miners-museum.co.uk/>

These are just some examples of how the 'intangible associations with place' can be maintained at a community level, and in doing so reduce the potential for resistance to change.

### **Recommendation**

2. Samaritans recommends that the Inquiry recognises the importance of honouring the historic and contemporary contribution of coal mining, (and indeed associated industries such as power production) by encouraging ways in which the 'intangible associations with place' can be appropriately celebrated.

## **References**

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