

**Submission  
No 223**

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

**Organisation:** Maules Creek Community Council

**Date Received:** 17 September 2019

**Re: Inquiry into the Sustainability of Energy Supply and Resources in NSW**

Dear Sir/Madam;

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry into the Sustainability of Energy Supply and Resources in NSW.

The Maules Creek Community Council (MCCC) is a community based organisation whose mission is to educate and inform the community and to liaise with government, resource companies and other community groups about issues relevant to the Maules Creek community. Maules Creek is located in the heart of the agricultural powerhouse of the Namoi Valley in North West NSW.

**Yours sincerely,**

**MCCC Inc**



# Submission to Inquiry into the Sustainability of Energy Supply and Resources in NSW

## Sustainable Resources at Maules Creek?

The MCCC is concerned about the development of coal resources in the Maules Creek area and across the state of NSW.

The coal mines located at Maules Creek have caused a raft of issues relating to surface and ground water, air quality, noise and de-population of the district.

Investigations that relate to the operation of the nearby companies have led to small fines and limited media outcry but no outcomes for people on the ground at Maules Creek other than to further de-populate the area via property purchases.

The companies seek modifications to the original planning approvals to circumvent the issues that relate to the fines or expand current operations to further exasperate the environmental issues. A pattern of non-cooperation with and misleading of investigators, means that there is no effective compliance of coal mines in NSW.

Mercifully, NSW has limited CSG operations, however experience in Qld is that there is no effective compliance of CSG in that state either.

The current dependence on fossil fuels in NSW, given the climate science means that the bulk of NSW energy supply is simply not sustainable. The global climate is increasingly more volatile. Drought conditions have been present at Maules Creek for 4 of the last 5 years.

At a local level the community post coal development is now very brittle. This can be seen by;

1. The loss of 13,000 Ha of agricultural land used by family farms at Maules Creek and over 100,000 Ha between Maules Creek and Gunnedah
2. Clearing of 4,200 Ha of Leard State Forest
3. Large areas of trees planted for biodiversity offsets on recently purchased farmland that will alienate those farms from agriculture
4. The loss of many farming families and farming businesses that have existed in the area for years. These families and businesses were part of the micro-economy that no longer exists as the community loses its critical mass
5. The number of people who are available to participate in local services such as the bush fire brigade are severely diminished making the area more vulnerable to fire
6. The loss of Maules Creek groundwater to the extent that has drained our aquifer leaving livestock enterprises in a parlous state counting the number of days until the groundwater fails and having to rely on limited or non-existent surface water
7. The total loss of surface water at Elfin Crossing which has never in living history been depleted.
8. The diversion of the back creek water catchment into the mine that is lost to the environment
9. The plan to leave a 600 Ha final void that will concentrate salts in the pit lake and evaporate water out of the district for ever

10. The emissions of dust, and noxious gases associated with coal mining that gets trapped in the inversion layer that is present most of the time at Maules Creek over winter, making the area hazardous to the health of older and susceptible residents

Unfortunately, the Planning process in relation to the nearby coal mines made no allowance or compensation for the “remnant community” who are massive losers in this situation. People become trapped in their own homes and have no choice but to bargain with a belligerent company who has numerous planning breaches but is not held to account.

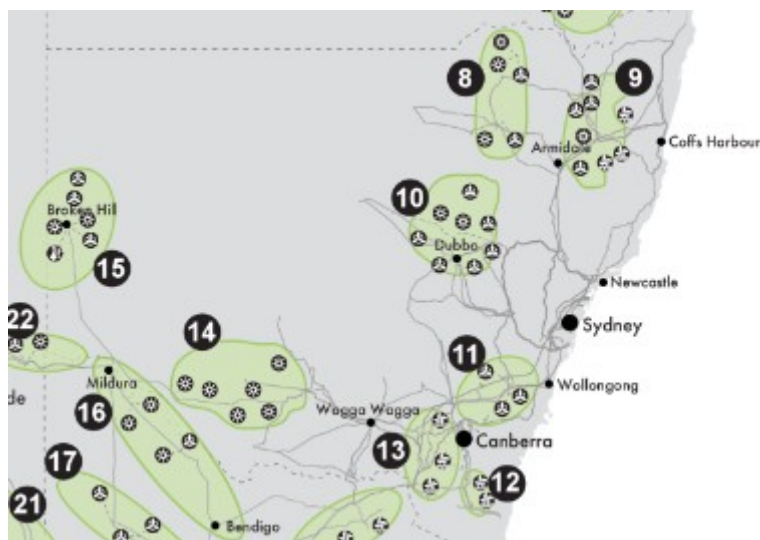
In a few short years, the healthy lifestyle and tight rural community has been destroyed. Very soon our community may be unlivable and de-populated with and aquifer completely drained. The few remaining farms are isolated, and devalued so that coal mining has reduced the sustainability of our community.

## Recommendations

1. Approve no more new or expanded coal mines
2. Approve no new gas fields
3. Increase compliance penalties and resourcing for the NSW EPA and review the agencies culture regarding coal mines and coal fired power stations
4. Ensure all mines must backfill pit voids
5. Develop chain of responsibility laws to ensure coal mine operators, directors, parent companies and financiers are held responsible for current and future liabilities should those mine operators be unable to comply with environmental regulations
6. Expand mine surveillance to ensure real time compliance instead of compliance based on flawed investigations of historical breaches
7. **Compensation measures or purchase/lease back packages be provided to Maules Creek residents to get out of the district in order to return to the area post coal with their health**

## Sustainable Energy Supply at Maules Creek

Maules Creek is located in the North West of NSW in the south of the NW Renewable Energy Zone (REZ) 8.



A large 132 kV transmission line passes through the district and a UTS Report “Renewable Narrabri<sup>1</sup>” maps the area as ideal for renewable energy that includes solar and wind.

A recently depopulated community such as Maules Creek that lacks a reliable water supply thanks to increasing drought and a thirsty coal mine could really use a plan from the state government to develop the renewable energy resources.

Unfortunately the transmission lines have no spare capacity for additional generation.

The Integrated System Plan (ISP) that guides the expansion of the transmission network has the transmission line that passes through Maules Creek for upgrade in a 2030. More than 10 years away.

A lack of clear policy at state or federal level has meant that the ISP program could even be further delayed.

The renewable energy industry has none of the issues associated with a coal mine or gasfield. No emissions of noxious gases, drawdown of the aquifer, destruction of forest, depopulation of community etc.

Renewables at Maules Creek would add to the sustainability and resilience of the community, giving the district a long term future.

## **Recommendations**

1. The NSW state government provide grants or low interest loans to bring forward the ISP program to upgrade transmission lines and associated infrastructure at Maules Creek and other parts of the state
2. Coal affected communities such as Maules Creek be prioritised for sustainable renewable energy

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1 <https://www.uts.edu.au/research-and-teaching/our-research/institute-sustainable-futures/our-research/energy-and-climate/100re-narrabri>