

**Submission
No 251**

SUSTAINABILITY OF ENERGY SUPPLY AND RESOURCES IN NSW

Organisation: Ryde Gladesville Climate Change Action Group

Date Received: 14 May 2020



[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
14 May 2020

The Committee Manager
Legislative Assembly Environment and Planning Committee
Parliament of New South Wales
Macquarie Street - Sydney NSW 2000

Re: Inquiry into Sustainability of Energy Supply and Resources

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on this important inquiry, particularly in light of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Ryde Gladesville Climate Change Action Group is a group of over 640 residents who are greatly concerned about climate change and the need for immediate and decisive action from all levels of government.

We meet federal and state representatives to highlight the community's desire for governments' action to reduce greenhouse emissions by moving to 100% renewables and phasing out fossil fuel mining. We are also active in the local community.

In the past, our group has organised bulk purchases of PV.

At present, NSW has no renewable energy target and continues to source more than 80% of its electricity needs from fossil fuels. Contrast this to South Australia's target of 100% renewables by 2030 and Tasmania's target of 200% by 2040. ACT has already reached its goal of 100%.

It has been noted in the press and general public the quality of air has been much better since the restrictions were put into place to deal with Covid-19. This is a positive outcome in terms of health for residents, particularly in cities.

In an article in Insurance Business Australia on 14 May 2020, it was noted that insurance companies needed to be more aware of the downside of underwriting and investment related to fossil fuel projects and to change their focus to a green recovery from Covid-19. The article also notes climate scientists are warning that a warming world makes the possibility of pandemics more likely.

In a Sydney Morning Herald article 4 May, economist Ross Garnaut has said the low cost of borrowing money means this is the perfect opportunity for investment in renewable energy

projects because the cost of capital has been reduced, previously the impediment to investment in clean energy.

The IEA has said the Covid-19 crisis seen a plunge in demand for fossil fuels and only renewables is holding up with the decrease in electricity demand.

In light of the above points, we believe there are many reasons why the NSW government should be moving rapidly away from reliance on fossil fuels and instead putting in clear policies and incentives for the transition to renewable energy. They are as follows:

1. Our coal-fired power stations are aging and unreliable and are frequently unable to perform at peak capacity.
2. The biggest source of air pollution is from these power stations. A study by Environment Justice Australia released in April 2020 showed that the levels of pollutants produced by Vales Point was particularly worrying. Centennial Coal has recently admitted the emissions data it submitted to the government was well below the actual figure.
3. Coal-fired power stations are unable to quickly respond to increased demand for electricity. During summer peak times, renewable energy sourced from roof-top PV has been able to rapidly and effortlessly fill the gap.
4. A report from the Australian Conservation Foundation this month has shown that coal mines and power stations use more water than Sydney households. This is a major concern to the health of our rivers and the fauna that relies on a continuous and healthy water source. It is also a concern because scientists forecast droughts will become more common due to climate change.
5. Polluted water from coal mining operations readily flows into river systems with weak controls and few prosecutions.
6. The destruction of habitats for coal and gas mining has resulted in more flora and fauna species being pushed to endangered or critically endangered levels.
7. Environmental laws are very weak and this has enabled fossil fuel projects to proceed with little regard for the long-term effects on native flora and fauna or health issues to people living close to these developments.
8. The burning of fossil fuels has led to rapid changes in our climate in the last thirty years. The extended drought and subsequent bushfires recently experienced by the residents of NSW can be attributed to the increasing levels of carbon in the atmosphere. Daily carbon levels in the atmosphere are now more than 418ppm. 350ppm is considered a safe level to avoid the world's temperature increasing over 2°C
9. Countries around the world are moving away from coal-fired power stations and to renewables which are a cheaper, more reliable and non-polluting. For example, in Europe, Sweden, Belgium and Austria have closed coal-fired power stations with eleven more countries to do so by 2025. In America, renewables sources are now providing more electricity than coal and in UK days where renewables are providing the bulk of electricity are becoming more frequent.
10. Banks are moving away from fossil fuel investments because they are increasingly seen as stranded assets. Individuals and organisations are divesting money from fossil fuel investments for the same reason.

11. Recent AGMs for Santos, Rio Tinto and Woodside have seen shareholders calling for mining companies to acknowledge the environmental damage caused by their activities and demanding they commit to moving to cleaner, carbon neutral business models.
12. Community groups affected by mining projects continue to challenge the validity of those projects. They are supported increasingly by the wider community.
13. Surveys and public demonstrations show an increasing concern about climate change and frustration at governments' unwillingness to act decisively to reduce carbon emissions.
14. The cost of renewable technology continues to be cheaper which means the cost of providing electricity from renewable sources is cheaper for consumers. An article in Renew Economy on 8 May suggests by switching to renewables, Australian industries could cut their electricity cost by a quarter and this could be a key to a revival in manufacturing in Australia. This could be an excellent opportunity for more jobs in regional areas to be created.
15. Australia's main markets for coal – Japan, China and South Korea – are planning to move to cleaner energy sources.
16. Australians are still enthusiastically installing PV on roof tops because of the economic and environmental benefits.
17. The NSW government has set a target of a zero-carbon economy by 2050, a woefully unambitious and inadequate target. A much better target year would be 2030.
18. Allowing long wall mining in Sydney's water catchment area is irresponsible and lacks acknowledgement of the possible long-term effects on not only Sydney's water quality and availability but on the ecosystems in that area.
19. Numerous studies and experience overseas and in Australia have shown there are more jobs in renewable energy industries than fossil fuel industries.
20. Recovery from Covid-19 must not rely on more fossil-fuel projects, in particular gas which is being strongly pushed by the federal government.
21. Businesses require a coherent and ambitious policy from both state and federal government for them to be able to move to zero-carbon, zero emissions business practices. At present, no such policies are in place.
22. The price of coal continues to drop. In an article in Australian Financial Review on 11 May, it was reported almost 60% of the world's thermal coal and 30% of Australia's thermal coal is unprofitable at current prices.
23. The government should reject the Narrabri CSG project because of the environmental damage it will cause. Gas can no longer be seen as a transition energy source.
24. Investment in renewables is growing round the world.
25. Over the Easter period 2020, more than 50% of Australia's main grid electricity production came from renewables.

There are several things we believe need to be done for NSW to move quickly to 100% renewable energy.

1. There must be a just transition period for workers in the fossil fuel industry to be re-trained and able to move into jobs in low emissions industries that are fulfilling and well paid. Germany has shown how it is possible to have a phased and orderly transition away from coal by consulting with both industry and unions. A reason for opposition to the closure of fossil fuel mines in local communities is the fear of loss of work. If a just transition is carried out, then a lot of that fear could be allayed.
2. A price on carbon is still the most effective method of reducing emissions and making the polluter responsible for the emissions they caused.
3. Community energy projects must be supported. Projects like Solar Gardens, mini or micro grids, community investment project (eg Repower Shoalhaven), bulk buy projects for PV and batteries and 100% Renewable Towns demonstrate that communities are keen to have their energy supply from renewable sources.
4. Biomass from native forests must not be used in the production of electricity.
5. People who are renting, living in apartments or low-income households are unable to take advantage of the benefits of renewable energy. Government incentives must be put into place for them enjoy the economic benefit of those households who have been able to install PV.
6. The government has not provided a clear plan for transition away from dependence on fossil fuel and towards an achievable target of 100% by 2030. This must be urgently put into place, including legislating a binding 5 yearly indication of progress made to reach a target of limiting world temperature increase to 1.5°C as agreed to by Australia at the Paris talks.
7. The government must set a plan for the phasing out coal-fired power stations so there is a complete transition to renewable energy by 2030.
8. An immediate moratorium on all gas developments both conventional and unconventional. An immediate moratorium on all new and expanded coal developments.
9. Logging of forests and woodlands has increased thirteen-fold since 2016 when regulations were relaxed. This has resulted in the destruction of large habitat areas and declining populations of native fauna and flora as well as severely weakening the biodiversity in NSW. The government has ignored the value of trees as the most effective carbon capture system and must put in place immediately a ban on such extensive and unnecessary logging and implement incentives for tree planting (and their ensured survival) to restore habitat for endangered animals such as koalas. Logging in areas burnt by the 2019-20 bushfires is totally unacceptable, particularly since the assessment of the impact of the fires has not been completed. This logging has now resulted in more animals being in peril of becoming endangered because of the loss of their remaining habitat.
10. Agriculture can plan a significant part in drawing down carbon emissions by changing how farming is done. By adopting regenerative farming methods such as managed grazing and silvopasture (methods described in Paul Hawken's book "Drawdown"), not only with carbon be removed from the atmosphere but the quality and health of the soil will be

significantly improved and reduce the need for artificial fertilizers. Healthier soils mean farms would be better able to withstand drought conditions.

11. The National Farmers Federation and Meat and Livestock Australia both have carbon neutral targets by 2030. Carbon farming is a method of sequestering carbon into the soil and an income source for farmers.

12. Support the uptake of electric vehicles in the community. Concessions for things like tolls and parking as was done in Norway, is an effective means of encouraging the uptake of electric vehicles and helping to reduce carbon emissions, particularly in major cities. The NSW government could also consider a reduction of registration as an additional method of encouraging drivers to change to electric vehicles. Government fleets should be made up of electric cars and businesses could be encouraged to have electric vehicles through government incentives. Public transport should be run on renewable energy and batteries. More conveniently located charging stations outside cities must be installed.

13. All new apartment and retail developments must be required to install PV and to require charging points for electric cars.

The Covid-19 pandemic puts NSW at a crossroads. Will the government continue to support unsustainable, polluting, detrimental to health, environmentally destructive fossil fuels for its energy source or will it listen to the scientists and community and put in strong, transparent policies and incentives to move the state to becoming a renewable energy hub. During Covid-19 the government has shown its willingness to listen to and act on advice from experts. We strongly encourage it to do the same for clean, renewable energy.

Pamela Reeves
Secretary
Ryde Gladesville Climate Change Action Group