

Submission  
No 9

## INQUIRY INTO COSTS FOR REMEDIATION OF SITES CONTAINING COAL ASH REPOSITORIES

**Organisation:** Lake Macquarie City Council

**Date Received:** 14 February 2020

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13 February 2020

## **Lake Macquarie City Council Staff Response on inquiry into the costs for remediation of sites containing coal ash repositories**

Lake Macquarie City Council (LMCC) staff are pleased to provide this submission to the inquiry into the costs for remediation of sites containing coal ash repositories (the inquiry) to the NSW public works committee. This is an important inquiry for LMCC as two sites identified in the terms of reference, Vales Point and Eraring power stations are located within our local government area (LGA).

Our submission focuses on 3 areas:

### **1. Coal ash is a resource not a waste product**

Council staff consider that finding an efficient, cost effective reuse of coal ash material will likely obviate legacy and rehabilitation issues for coal ash repositories. Council staff are very supportive of actions that would achieve reuse of this material as we see many benefits for our LGA, the Hunter and the State of NSW. Coal Ash can be used in a variety of products that would directly result in less virgin material extracted from mines and quarries. Keeping resources in the economy is a focus for LMCC and we are currently working to maximise the benefits of shifting to a circular economy.

Coal ash should be viewed by the NSW Government as a resource rather than waste and the NSW Government should be prioritising opportunities to reuse this material. We understand coal ash has a range of uses including in building and construction products. These uses include as an additive in cementitious material as well as road base. Some local examples of reuse may include in material for grouting underground coal mines and in our local road network. Experiences from other countries dealing with similar issues could provide examples and information relevant to the inquiry.

Through consultation with business in our LGA we are aware that the opportunity to reuse this material is substantial, however it is not without its challenges. We are also aware of individuals with technical expertise in coal ash reuse and would be happy to provide these details to the inquiry. There are substantial economic benefit and opportunities in developing new industries that assist in the reuse of fly ash.

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126-138 Main Road  
Speers Point NSW 2284  
Box 1906 HRMC NSW 2310

T 02 4921 0333  
E [council@lakemac.nsw.gov.au](mailto:council@lakemac.nsw.gov.au)  
W [lakemac.com.au](http://lakemac.com.au)



ABN: 81 065 027 868

## **2. Regulatory regime**

Council staff would encourage the public works committee to not only look at the regulatory regime for ensuring best practice remediation but also regulatory requirements in the context of coal ash being recognised as a resource and not a waste stream. This paradigm shift in thinking is essential to maximise reuse options and reduce remediation liabilities. Under the existing NSW regulatory regime, it is very difficult, both in terms of cost and time to reuse material such as coal ash as it classified as waste under the *Protection of Environment Operations Act 1997* (POEO Act). The current regulatory regime may act as a barrier for reuse and result in less than optimal outcomes for this material, most likely rehabilitation within the existing ash dams. Similar challenges have been identified and addressed in the *EU's Circular Economy Action Plan* and 2 years ago the South Australia EPA included "support highest and best reuse of recovered materials" into their regulatory objectives. A similar approach for NSW to removing regulatory barriers and ensuring a coherent and consistent policy approach to reuse would be a very effective way to reduce the NSW Government's liability for coal ash repositories and to attract and develop new industries into the region. This could be realised by the State Government to unlock the potential of organisations like EPA and RMS to contribute to reuse solutions instead of limiting their activities to current approaches.

## **3. Logistics and transport**

We understand that logistics for transportation is challenging as coal ash is very light and difficult to transport. Whilst demand and opportunities for reuse may be high, coal ash is a low-cost product and accordingly logistic infrastructure needs to be low cost to make it reuse commercially viable. The review should consider options for industries to be co-located on sites where ash repositories are located further assisting the opportunity for reuse. This may include cement works, concrete batching plants, ashplant plants and the like.

In summary, Council staff would encourage the Public Works Committee to broaden the focus of this review not just on remediation but to reuse opportunities. Maximising the reuse of this material will optimise economic, environmental and social outcomes.

Should you require further information, please contact me on 4921 0220.

Yours faithfully,

Tony Farrell  
**Deputy CEO**