

INQUIRY INTO COSTS FOR REMEDIATION OF SITES CONTAINING COAL ASH REPOSITORIES

Organisation: Lithgow Environment Group Inc.

Date Received: 15 February 2020



Lithgow Environment Group Inc.

PO Box 3081 Bowenfels, NSW 2790

www.lithgowenvironment.org

Preserving the Balance of Nature

14 February 2020

Legislative Council Public Works Committee
NSW Parliament House
Macquarie Street Sydney NSW 2000
By email: public.works@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Re: Inquiry into the costs for remediation of sites containing coal ash repositories

Introduction

Thank you for this opportunity to make a submission on a very important local issue. The Lithgow Environment Group Inc. was formed in 2006 to protect, conserve, and enhance our unique natural environment, landscapes, flora, fauna, and waterways.

The Lithgow region has made a significant contribution to the NSW economy for over 150 years. However our local community and the environment has paid a high price for providing NSW with coal-fired electricity. There is one operating power station (Mount Piper) and two disused power stations (Wallerawang, Lithgow) in our region. In addition there are the human health and environmental impacts from coal mines that supply fuel to these power stations.

The NSW Government has a poor record of managing local coal-ash repositories during their operation, and a poor record of rehabilitating coal ash repositories after power station closure.

It should not be necessary for our small group to advise the NSW Government about the many serious issues associated with coal-ash disposal. These issues have been highlighted in ad nauseum through extensive research in Australia and overseas over many decades, most recently in the SBS News item 'Ticking time bomb' of toxic coal ash putting Australian lives at risk"

<https://www.sbs.com.au/news/ticking-time-bomb-of-toxic-coal-ash-putting-australian-lives-at-risk-new-report-says>

We urge the Committee to read the excellent publication by Environmental Justice Australia - *Unearthing Australia's Toxic Coal Ash Legacy* https://www.envirojustice.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/EJA_CoalAshReport-lr.pdf

The Lithgow Environment Inc (LEG) therefore supports this inquiry, and strongly encourages the NSW Government to allocate adequate funding towards decontamination and remediation of all coal ash disposal sites in the Lithgow region.

Limited Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference require the Public Works Committee to inquire into and report on the costs for remediation of coal ash repositories in NSW. Only Mount Piper Power Station is mentioned in those Terms of Reference. We remind the Committee that the NSW Government built, owned, operated, and is therefore responsible for the costs of remediation of coal-ash disposed from three (3) power stations in the Lithgow Region –

1. Mount Piper Power Station – commissioned 1992/93
2. Wallerawang Power Station – first commissioned 1957, closed 2014
3. Lithgow Power Station – first commissioned 1928, closed 1964

Lithgow Power Station

Lithgow Power Station in State Mine Gully illustrates the history of profound negligence by the NSW Government in failing in the past to adequately fund the decontamination and rehabilitation of coal-fired power stations and coal ash waste in NSW.

The first stage of Lithgow Power Station was commissioned in 1928 by the NSW Government Railways. Additional units were added in 1931, 1936, 1948, 1953 & 1956. It closed in 1964 and was demolished in the 1970's. 55 years later the site has still not been adequately rehabilitated



The NSW Government reputedly sold the site for a peppercorn sum of \$1.00 to a company which profited from salvaging what was saleable, demolished it, then 'donated' the site to a fledgling community organisation which had neither the expertise, manpower, or resources to adequately decontaminate or rehabilitate the site.

The site is contaminated with 40 years of accumulated coal waste, coal ash, asbestos, and is infested with a range of Noxious Weeds such as Blackberry, Scotch Broom, and Pampas Grass. The only public protection from hazardous asbestos is a basic 4 strand plain wire fence. Coal fires on the coal and ash waste heaps are a regular occurrence, most recently in the 2013 State Mine Fire, and 2019/20 Gospers Mountain Fire.

Lithgow State Mine Museum

January 14 · 2020

More photos from yesterday's chitter Fire.



[Clarence / Dargan Bushfire Brigade](#) Like Page
January 13 ·

Fire call to State Mine Gulley behind the museum. On site with Marangaroo. Clarence 1 with crew 3. Marangaroo set up monitor. A dirty smelly job, that someone has to do. Bush and Coal fire fighters.

[Lithgow State Mine Museum](#)

January 14 · 2020

Apparently an Estonian news crew covered yesterday's chitter fire.





Tim Elderton

January 13 2020

I had the privilege of escorting an international news team from Estonia around the bushfire damaged areas of Lithgow today. As we were interviewing at the State Mine this afternoon, another flare up occurred behind the Mining Museum.

Yet another underground coal chitter fire, still burning since the Gospers Mountain bushfire tore through here over three weeks ago. An excavator was called in to dig it all out.

Lithgow State Mine Museum is at [Lithgow State Mine Heritage Park & Railway](#).

January 14 · [Lithgow](#) ·

Some sad news. Yesterday a coal chitter Fire was detected in the bank of the former Steelworks Colliery headshunt. This was located directly above the ruins of an old horse stables connected with the Lithgow State Coal Mine. An excavator had to cross the stables to expose the fire and this had potentially damaged the ruin. We sought approval from the Heritage Branch, Office of Premier & Cabinet to take this action. The fire has been extinguished and the stables are now buried. It's probably the best outcome in the circumstances. It does highlight that the museum will need financial assistance to recover from these fires.



After every severe bushfire “gully raker” storms cause massive erosion, spreading coal ash contaminants into State Mine Creek, the Cocks River, and Sydney’s drinking water supply.

A few token Landcare-style tree planting projects have been funded at the site over the years by either the Federal and/or NSW Governments. However, these have had very minimal success at decontaminating, arresting erosion, or adequately rehabilitating this site.

We fear that this history of neglect by the NSW Government is about to be repeated at the Wallerawang Power Station coal ash disposal site at Kerosene Vale.

Wallerawang Power Station

In July 2013 the NSW Government sold Wallerawang and Mount Piper Power Station’s to Energy Australia for \$160 million. Wallerawang Power Station was reputedly sold for only \$1 million. Energy Australia closed Wallerawang Power Station a year later. The \$1 million purchase price included Kerosene Vale Ash Repository, which Energy Australia ‘maintained’ for 5 years, after which **responsibility reverted to control of NSW Treasury from July 2019.**

NSW Treasury sold Wallerawang Power Station and Kerosene Vale Ash Repository for \$1 million. The NSW taxpayer has now inherited the cost of decontaminating and rehabilitating Kerosene Vale Ash Repository That cost could run into 100’s of \$millions!!!

The first 4 x 30MW Units at Wallerawang Power Station were built 1957–59, two more 60MW Units were added in 1961/2, Unit 7 in 1976, and Unit 8 in 1980. The power station closed in 2014. Therefore Kerosene Vale Ash Repository holds **57 years of accumulated coal ash.**

The Kerosene Vale Ash Repository fills the entire valley of Sawyers Swamp Creek. It is on top of old mine voids and coal chitter from the old Lisdale open cut coal mine. It is immediately **adjacent the old Newcom Colliery underground Mine workings, which are hydraulically connected to Angus Place Colliery and Springvale Colliery underground mine workings.** .

Heavy metals, salts, and other contaminants have been leaching into into these hydraulically connected underground mine workings for many decades.

Kerosene Vale Ash Repository has a 60 year history of coal ash placement –

- 1957 – 1976: Dry-ash placement, which was coarser material and contained higher levels of carbon which appaently is unsuited for re-use in cement manufacture;
- 1976 – 2002: Wet-slurry ash placement from Unit 7/8 into Kerosene Vale Ash Dam (KVAD);
- 2002 – 2014: Dry-ash placement into Kerosene Vale Ash Repository (KVAR) Stage 1 until February 2009, and KVAR Stage 2 from April 2009 to 2014.

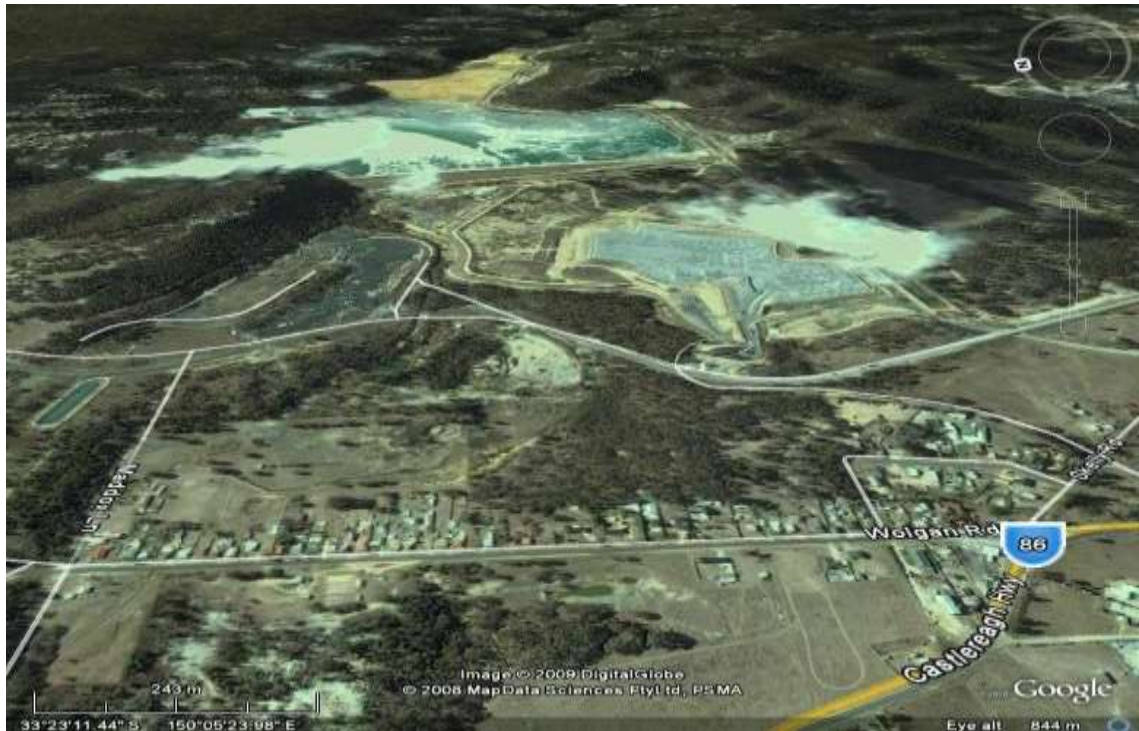


Photo: Kerosene Vale As Repository with Lidsdale township in the foreground. Dam Safety is an obvious issue for Lidsdale if the Ash Dam (KVAD) upstream is breached.





Dam Safety is an obvious issue for the village of Lidsdale with some 100 houses located 1.4km downstream of Kerosene Vale Ash Dam (KVAD). If this dam fails, the town could be buried under 60 million tonnes of toxic coal ash sludge.

Coal ash dumps are regulated under the Dams Safety Act 1978 (DS Act), and Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997 (POEO Act). Power station ash dumps are considered tailings dams for the Dams Safety Committee's purposes.

The Dams Safety Committee is required to provide five-yearly surveillance reports, however these reports are not publicly available. The stability of the Eraring ash dump recently made the headlines when the [Myuna Bay Sports and Recreation Centre](#) was forced to close due to safety threats from Eraring's ash dump. And yet in November 2019 the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE) approved the expansion of Eraring Power Station's 35 million tonne coal-ash storage by 5 million cubic metres???

On 14 January 2020 Liddell Power Station was fined \$100,000 for breaching Coal Ash regulations. External testing revealed that the coal ash contained elevated levels of heavy metals including chromium and cadmium. ([AGL Macquarie Cops \\$100,000 Coal Ash Penalty](#) <https://www.solarquotes.com.au/blog/agl-coal-ash-mb1365/>).

This followed a \$15,000 fine in May 2018 after Liddell Power Station allowed coal ash slurry to overflow and drain into an area of sensitive vegetation (Central Hunter Box - Ironbark Woodland, classed as an Endangered Ecological Community in NSW). <https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/news/media-releases/2018/epamedia180529>

Brain-eating Amoeba (*Naegleria fowleri*, also known as brain-eating Virus). In 2016 AGL advised that Lake Liddell had been closed since March after the discovery of a brain-eating virus. Lake Liddell is heavily impacted by coal ash contaminants from Liddell Power Station. [Brain-eating virus forces lake closure](https://www.newcastleherald.com.au/story/4093667/brain-eating-virus-forces-lake-closure/) (<https://www.newcastleherald.com.au/story/4093667/brain-eating-virus-forces-lake-closure/>)

Clearly the residents of Lidsdale are faced with imminent as well as long-term potentially life-threatening issues from the Kerosene Vale Ash Dam (KVAD, including Dam Collapse, flooding, heavy metal pollution, Brain-eating Amoeba, and more. The KVAD must be drained, decontaminated, adequately capped with a satisfactory depth of soil, and revegetated.

Dust and associated health issues from Dust blown off Kerosene Vale Ash Repository.

For many years local residents of Lidsdale and surrounding areas complained about dust blowing off Kerosene Vale Ash Repository. The NSW Government-owned Delta Electricity continually denied there was a problem, claimed there was “no evidence”, stated that “we’ll trust our \$250k Consultant, thanks”, and basically labelled people who complained as liars.

In 2007 the issue was finally raised in the public domain, see below –

Lithgow Mercury

27 September 2007

EPA targets Wang dust up

LEN ASHWORTH

Sources within the industry have rejected claims that dust problems being experienced in the Blackmans Flat/ Lidsdale area are originating from the ash dump at Mt Piper power station.

Instead they point the blame at the Wallerawang power station ash dams and what they described as a now abandoned briquette operation at the old Wallerawang Colliery site.

On Tuesday the Mercury reported that Lithgow Council was calling for an urgent meeting with Delta Electricity to attempt to resolve problems with the Mt Piper ash facility.

Cr Howard Fisher had raised the issue at last week’s meeting of Council when he said residents in the affected area were putting up with deplorable conditions during windy weather.

Cr Fisher said he had made a personal inspection during the recent high winds and had been appalled at the level of dust in the air.

He said that everything was covered in ‘fine white powder’

“Residents had a right to be concerned,” Cr Fisher said.

“It’s an absolutely deplorable situation when the wind blows.”

It was the latest in a sequence of similar complaints from the Blackmans Flat area.

But according to industry sources the criticism is being misdirected.

And that view is supported by the Environment Protection Authority, the EPA.

EPA regional spokesman Richard Whyte said the authority does not have a problem with the control measures at the Mt Piper ash dump.

The Mt Piper dump is continually ‘capped’ and has hundreds of water spray outlets.

Mr Whyte said that in recent times the EPA had sent inspectors from the Bathurst office to investigate complaints from residents of dust from the Wallerawang ash dam at Kerosene Vale.

He said the inspectors had witnessed the dust clouds and shortfalls in the capping procedures.

The EPA has had discussions with Delta and their Wallerawang contractors regarding the need for adequate measures to prevent the ash from blowing from the site.

“We served a notice to ensure there would not be a repeat of the occurrence,” he said.

The targeting of the Wallerawang dump will come as something of a change of direction for Council where the debate on dust problems has always centred on Mt Piper.

Mayor Neville Castle said representatives from Delta are scheduled to address the next meeting of Council on Tuesday night when it is hoped to literally clear the air' on the dust complaints.

** THE latest concerns come at a time when Delta is seeking to significantly increase the size of the Kerosene Vale ash dam.*

Residents have received correspondence from a firm of consultants, Parsons Brinckerhoff Australia, who are carrying out an environmental assessment on behalf of delta.

The consultants said the ash storage is essential to the ongoing operation of the power station.

"Delta has, and continues to, investigate opportunities to reuse dry conditioned ash to minimize storage requirements but at the moment most ash must be stored in the repository", project manager Nigel Buchanan said.

He said that in 2001 delta decided that there was an operational need to changing the management of the ash from a wet process as in the past to a dry ash.

It is this dry ash that is causing most of the problems according to residents.

One Wolgan Road resident Jim Whitty said the dry ash was like talcum powder and it took only minimal air movement to produce floating clouds.

"We wonder how much we can ingest before it becomes a health issue," he said.

Mr Whitty claimed residents were not opposed to the ash dam but would like to see a return to the wet slurry management to prevent dust.

"As the dump grows and with the wind in the right direction this will become as much problem for Lithgow as for Lidsdale and Blackmans Flat," he said.

But the expansion plan now being studied is to provide for an additional 5.3 million cubic metres of 'dry conditioned ash', taking the total storage 7.8 million cubic metres.

This will allow for a further 11 to 15 years of operation.

Expansion of the dump would require the diversion of Sawyers Swamp Creek and excavation of material from the pine plantation.

Despite this, Delta Electricity continued to deny, cover-up, obfuscate and lie about the dust problems until actual workers at Kerosene Vale Ash Repository complained about safety issues for poor visibility due to the dust. This finally prompted the EPA to take action, and Delta Electricity were fined \$80,000. The Court Case proceedings are essential reading. Also see below -

\$80,000 payout for Delta Electricity over licence breach

Carbon + Environment Daily <http://www.cedaily.com.au>

Tuesday, 17 February 2009 1:42pm

The NSW environment court has ordered Delta Electricity to pay \$80,000 after hearing that high winds and Thiess Services' poor management of a fly-ash stockpile were factors triggering dust complaint.

Heavy metal, salt, asbestos and other Pollutants

Kerosene Vale Ash Repository has a long and chequered history of heavy metal, salt, asbestos and other contamination of groundwater aquifers, mine voids, underground mine workings, Sawyers Swamp Creek, and the Sydney Drinking Water Catchment.

The NSW Government via the EPA and state-owned Delta Electricity, Energy Australia, and more recently NSW Treasury, have continued to deny, cover-up, obfuscate, and lie about the true health and environmental impacts coal ash dumped at Kerosene Vale.

Whilst researching for a Submission on Stage 2 of Kerosene Vale Ash Repository (KVAR) around 2010 LEG discovered many examples of heavy metal, salt, asbestos and more. Rather than retype all of that, we have copied some of that below, however refer the Committee to the DoPIE Major Projects Register to view all Submissions on Stage 2 of Kerosene Vale Ash Repository (KVAR).

- Parsons Brinckerhoff (2008) cited water quality data collected by Delta Electricity between 1991 - 2007 at Sawyers Swamp Creek which identified elevated **salinity, Lead, Cadmium, Copper, Zinc, Aluminium, Boron, and Nitrogen** concentrations exceeding ANZECC ecosystem protection guidelines.
- Hyder & ERM (2002) identified elevated concentrations of **Boron, Fluoride, Aluminium, Nickel, Zinc and Cadmium** within waters of Swayers Swamp Creek Ash Dam (SSCAD).
- Birch et al (2001) recorded **Cobalt** levels in Sawyers Swamp Creek which were the highest concentrations for Cobalt recorded in any waterway in the Cox's River catchment (113 µg/g).
- The Ecology Lab (June 2007) recorded **Salinity** levels above 800 µS/cm at 2 points on Sawyers Swamp Creek, Turbidity levels above ANZECC Guidelines for an upland river, and high levels of **Nickel and Manganese. Macro-invertebrate and faunal assemblages** as well as **fish communities** in Sawyers Swamp Creek were identified as being *severely impaired*.
- Water testing by SCA field staff in May 2007 recorded **salinity levels of 1600 µS/cm in Sawyers Swamp Ck**, which exceeds the ANZECC (2000) upper limit of 1500 µS/cm above which adverse biological impacts can occur. They also recorded ANZECC exceedances for **Nickel, Zinc, Manganese & Iron. Cobalt & Nitrogen** levels were also very high.
- Lithgow Environment Group Streamwatch monitoring of Sawyers Swamp Creek since September 2006 consistently recorded **salinity** levels exceeding ANZECC Drinking Water upper limits of 800 µS/cm. On 3 occasions it exceeded 1500 µS/cm, above which adverse biological impacts can occur.
- Parsons Brinckerhoff (2008) identified that leachate from Kerosene Vale Fly-ash Dam had **contaminated water in underground mine workings of the adjacent old Newcom Colliery**.
- In 2003 Springvale Colliery (POEO Lic. No. 3607) exceeded licence discharge limits for **Hexavalent Chromium (Cr VI)** and **Selenium** from discharge points LD 4/5 on Newnes Plateau. Cr (VI) is a man-made not a naturally occurring substance, and Selenium is not normally found in minewater. The most likely source is leachate from the adjacent Kerosene Vale fly-ash dam. When LEG asked a senior Centennial Coal Manager about these exceedances the reply was "Shame about ash dams isn't it!".
- Parsons Brinckerhoff cite the DNR Bore Registry which records 89 bores within a 10 km radius of KVAR Stage 2. Most are registered for private/domestic use (stock or irrigation bores) with only 9 registered for government or other uses. Groundwater contamination of 89 private/domestic use bores is highly likely.

SOURCES

1. *Parsons Brinckerhoff (2008), Stage 2 KVAR: Technical Report 2 – Surface Water Impact Assessment, Appendix 4*
2. *Birch, G., Siaka, M., and Owens, C. (2001). The source of anthropogenic heavy metals in fluvial sediments of a rural catchment: Cox's River, Australia. Water, Air and Soil Pollution 126, pp.13-35.*
3. *Hyder and ERM (2002). Proposed Reinstatement of Dry Ash Placement, Kerosene Vale, Review of Environmental Factors*
4. *The Ecology Lab(2007). Ecology Studies for the Kerosene Vale Stage 2 Ash Repository Area.*
5. *Australian Drinking Water Guidelines 6, 2004.*
http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/files/adwg_11_06.pdf
6. *Australian and New Zealand Guidelines for Fresh and Marine Water Quality (ANZECC & ARMCANZ 2000).*
7. *SCA Upper Cox's River field site monitoring data, 15 & 16 May 2007: Site 3 – Sawyers Swamp Creek*
8. *LEG/LRS Streamwatch Monitoring 2006/2008: Site 3 – Sawyers Swamp Creek.*
9. *EPA POEO Licence Register (www.epa.nsw.gov.au/prpoeo/searchregister.aspx)*
10. *Harris, J. and Hillman, T. 1991. Assessment of the effects of cooling tower blowdown upon the ecology of the Cocks River. Report for Electricity Commission of New South Wales. 18pp. In AWT (1992) Water Quality of Cocks River and Tributaries 1962-1990. Compiled by Jones, H., Australian Water Technologies, Science and Environment Division, West Ryde.*

Asbestos dumping at kerosene Vale Ash repository

In 2005 a local Lidsdale resident walking her dog found white fibrous material unearthed by Wombat's only 300 metres from homes in Lidsdale. She suspected it was asbestos, so rang Delta Electricity who denied there was any Asbestos in the area. She contacted the EPA who investigated, found it was in fact Asbestos, but did nothing. Finally she contacted NSW Senator Lee Rhiannon MP, who visited the site Asbestos Disposal Area sign was installed in May 2005.

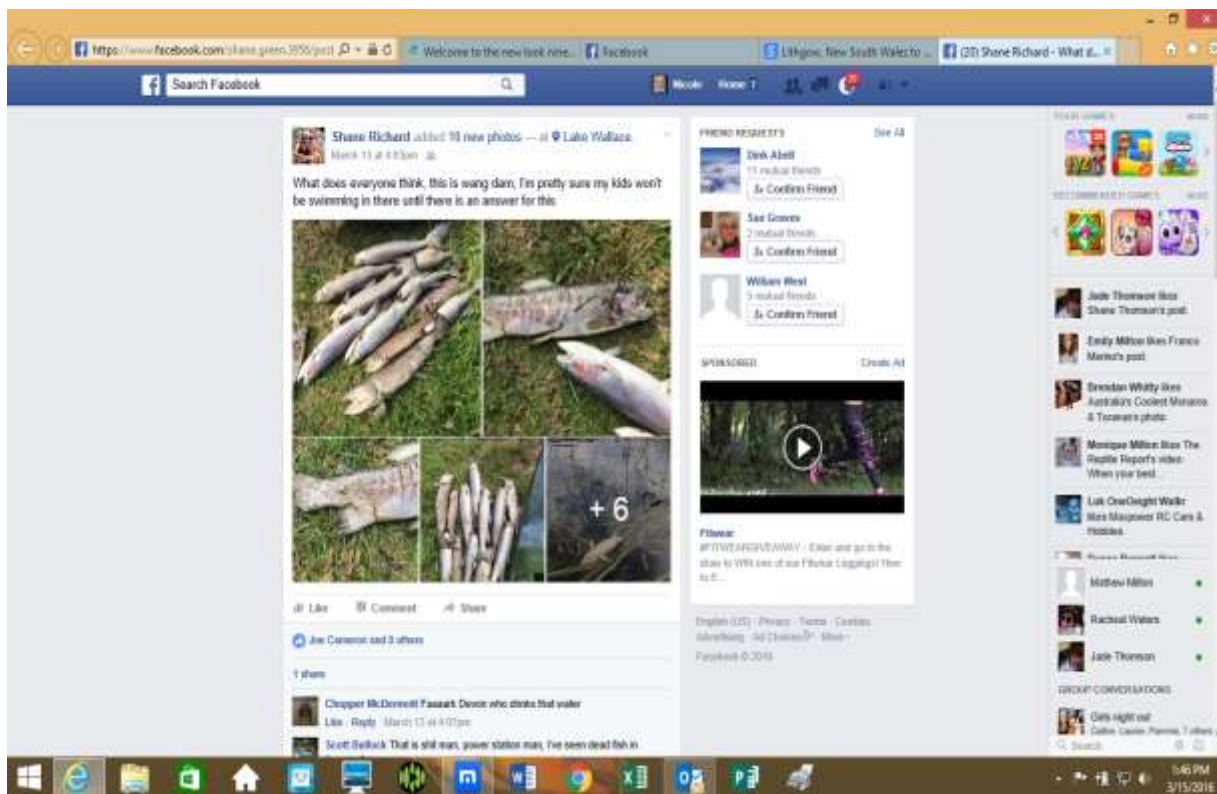
This Asbestos Disposal Area sign below was only installed in May 2005 after political intervention.



Fish Kills, deformed fish, downstream of Kerosene Vale Ash Repository

Numerous reports of deformed fish (mainly Rainbow Trout) in Lake Wallace have been reported to LEG. The EPA has apparently tested some of these deformed fish and verbally confirmed that abnormally high levels of Selenium were recorded.

On 13 March 2016 the fish kill below at Lake Wallace was reported, 2016 was an exceptionally wet year, so it was unlikely to be a result of deoxygenated water.



On 3 January 2020 LEG recorded a fish kill below in the Coxs River, Maddox Lane Lidsdale 200m downstream of the Sawyers Swamp Creek inflow from Kerosene Vale Ash Repository. There is evidence that Energy Australia and/or contractors for NSW Treasury may have been releasing water from Kerosene Vale Ash Dam (KVAD). This was reported to the EPA.



Mount Piper Power Station

The Ash Disposal area for Mount Piper Power Station was approved by Lithgow City Council in 1992. It was **unlined**, is in part located in old open-cut voids and on top of coal chitter and coal waste piles, and the entire area has riddled with underground mine workings associated with the old Ivanhoe Colliery, Western Main Colliery, and Eastern Main (Wallerawang) Colliery.

Further, these old mine workings are hydraulically connected in the north and east to old Renown Colliery, Invincible Colliery, Ivanhoe North Mine, and potentially also Baal Bone Colliery.

There is absolutely no doubt that coal ash leachate from Mount Piper Ash Dump currently is, and has for at least two decades, been leaking into these old underground mine workings, spreading a toxic pollution plume far and wide well beyond the confines of Mount Piper Power Station.

Of major concern is the fact that Energy Australia are currently seeking approval for a Waste to Energy Unit or municipal waste incinerator, which will generate some of the most toxic ash known to man, which they intend to bury in the Mount Piper Ash Dump, despite the fact it is already leaking!

Below are examples of Salt leaching from Mount Piper Ash Dump, as well as Acid Mine Drainage AMD.

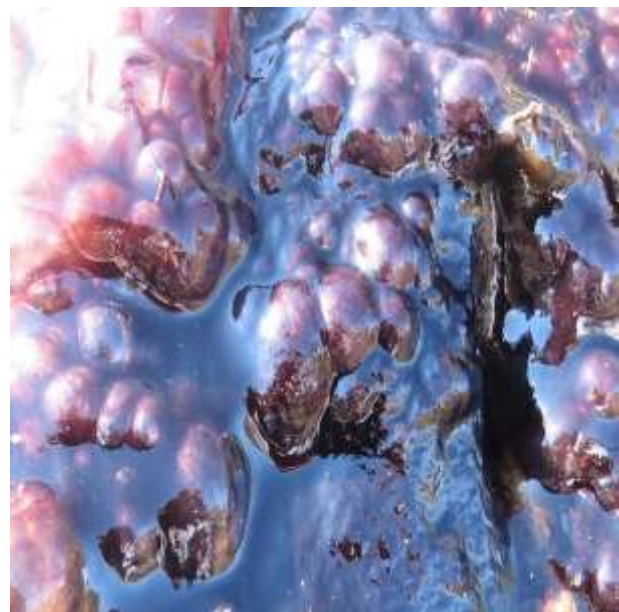


Photo: Salt encrustation and AMD – Castlereagh Highway adjacent Mt Piper Ash Dump - 10 April 2016



Photo: Concrete cancer due to Acid Mine Drainage at base of bridge along Castlereagh Highway adjacent Mount Piper Power Station Ash repository and Brine Ponds.

Mount Piper Power Station generates large quantities of Brine three times saltier than sea-water from Cooling Water Blowdown at Unit 1 & 2. This brine is disposed of in the Mount Piper Ash Emplacement Area, where it is supposedly 'fixed' and 'immobilized' in the coal ash.

However since 2006 Salinity at one site monitored by LEG adjacent Mount Piper Power Station (Springvale LDP006) has increased 7 fold, from 1000 $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$ in 2006 to 7,780 $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$ recently. This upwards trend will continue unless serious action is taken to reduce leakage from coal ash.



Photo: Comparison of Salinity in some NSW Rivers compared to Springvale LDP6 adjacent Mt Piper

Coal Ash Dust blowing from Mount Piper Power Station

Dust blowing off Mount Piper Coal Ash Emplacement areas has been a serious human health issue for the residents of Blackmans Flat for many years. The dust has on occasion been so bad that members of Cullen Bullen Rural Fire Brigade have reported call-outs from motorists along the Castlereagh Highway reporting a bushfire, which turned out to be dust.

Delta Electricity routinely denied there was an issue, claimed there was “no evidence”, “we’ll trust our \$250k per year Consultants thanks”, and basically labelled anyone who complained as a liar.

Lithgow City Council has a long history of protecting the coal mining and power generation industry, plus approved the original 1992 Mount Piper Ash Emplacement, so was party to the cover-up. That was until September 2007, when Council finally spoke out – see below



LITHGOW MERCURY

25 September 2007

Mt Piper facing an ash disposal crisis

LEN ASHWORTH

Delta Electricity appears to be facing a major new challenge in dealing with the most obvious of the by products from its generation process, the huge volumes of fly ash.

The ash is from the boilers at the power stations and is a residual headache with all coal fired operations.

And in Lithgow Council there has been increasing agitation about the conditions of the ever growing ash dump at the Mt Piper power station.

The dump, now visible for a long distance along the Castlereagh Highway, is increasingly being described as an environmental disaster.

The major concerns expressed in Council relate to the impact of the ash on residential areas around Blackmans Flat and Lidsdale.

In this week's monthly ordinary meeting of Council there were again calls for urgent action to address the problem.

Cr Howard Fisher said that in the high wind conditions of last week he had responded to a request by residents between Lidsdale and Blackmans Flat to carry out an on site inspection.

He said that he had received numerous complaints about the conditions aggravated by the high winds.

"Residents had a right to be concerned," he said. "The entire area was coated in a white powder.

It's an absolutely deplorable situation when the wind blows."

Cr Fisher said Council must move urgently for a crisis meeting with Delta.

"They have to tell us what they are going to do about the fly ash and what they will do to protect these residents," he said.

Mayor Neville Castle said that moves have already been initiated to seek to address the problem.

He said Delta representatives had indicated they would meet with Council at the next committee meeting on October 2.

Delta had been scheduled for a similar meeting with Council last month but had to cancel at the last meeting due to what was described as an accident involving one of the representatives.

The Mt Piper ash dump has been highlighted at Council as one of a wide range of industrial environmental problems affecting Blackmans Flat.

Council has been told that the ash dump has grown too big to be manageable and that the dust in the air at times is like fog.

There have been no recent complaints about the ash disposal system at Delta's Wallerawang power station.

The problems being experienced at Blackmans Flat are reminiscent of the issues facing Portland years ago when the cement works was in full operation, with a constant 'fallout' of cement dust causing an environmental headache.

Council told - when it comes to public impact --

Industry doesn't care; Sartor hasn't a clue

Story: LEN ASHWORTH

Lithgow Council was told this week that a 'myriad of problems' confronting residents around the village of Blackmans Flat were the result of 'mining companies that no longer care', a State planning Minister who doesn't have a clue what his department is doing, and bureaucrats who 'are not interested'.

The strong criticism came when Council was considering an application for increased production and an associated increase in road haulage from the Pinedale a cut mine.

Regional Services Manager Andrew Muir told the meeting of Council's Finance and Services Committee that Pinedale currently has approval to mine 200,000 tonnes per annum.

Part of the approval was that after an initial six month period the coal was not to be hauled to Mt Piper and Wallerawang power stations by public roads.

That approval also called for the company to negotiate with the operators of a private haul to utilise that facility for the power station deliveries.

Mr Muir said the company now wants to vary that consent to increase production to

350,000 tonnes a year and to utilise the Castlereagh Highway for a period of five years.

The company argued that the condition imposed by Council restricting the use of a public road was not valid under common law.

This submission was rejected in a legal opinion obtained by Council.

Mr Muir said the 75 per cent increase in tonnage had been sought by the company to meet power station orders.

He said this would obviously mean a significant reduction in the life of the mine

from 10 to six years.

While this shorter period would benefit residents in the area the downside was the increase in truck movements and this could not be justified.

Mr Muir said that a private haul road exists adjacent to the mining operation and was 'incongruous that heavy vehicles would have to travel by public road when such a facility is so close'.

He said that council officers strongly favour retention of the condition relating to road haulage.

Continued Page 2

Critical of industrial sprawl

From Page 1

Cr Wayne McAndrew said the condition relating to haulage was appropriate if the haul road was to be used.

"Not one of these operators like Delta, Centurion or Pinedale are able to sit down and consider what they are doing to the community."

holding the community to ransom and it's wrong," he said.

Mayor Neville Castle said most

Dust from Coal Ash at Mount Piper was a major issue in these two Media articles.

Get us out of here

Town surrounded by mines wants to be moved



Neighbour from hell . . . a children's playground overlooks an open cut mine in Blackmans Flat, near Lithgow.

By MICHELLE CAZZULINO

BLACKMAN'S Flat is a town surrounded — and after more than two years of opposing plans to expand nearby coal mining and waste disposal operations, residents are waving the white flag.

About 11 families in the 15-house settlement have begun petitioning the State Government to relocate them, claiming that the "industrial arsehole" being wreaked on the tiny village, about 15km from Lithgow, is making it uninhabitable.

While some locals, such as Chris Jonkers, bought their houses as recently as four years ago, they say at the time of purchase they were led to believe mining operations in the area were winding down.

Instead, Mr Jonkers said he had spent 18 months fighting six major permit mining, power-generation and waste disposal projects.

"Most of the property searches that we all had told us that the mining was coming to an end and therefore we thought they'd be rehabilitating all this," he said.

"Nobody wants to buy here. We can't go and we can't stay, so we're stuck."



Call for action . . . residents say industry has made the town uninhabitable

As well as environmental concerns, Mr Jonkers said residents felt like they were constantly under siege.

"There's screeching noise from trucks reversing six days a week — we're starting to hear it in our dreams," he said. "Everything we touch or grow in the garden is covered in dust, the coal trucks come roaring down the highway and cracks are starting to appear in our walls."

"Every time a blast goes up, we get a huge mushroom cloud of dust and the windows shake. It's like living in Iran."

Among other residents looking to move are a 90-year-old who has been a lifelong resident of Blackman's Flat and Robert and Beverly Pyne, who have lived there for the past 40 years. Local Michelle Vincent, who has been in the area for eight years, said the town was simply uninhabitable.

"We don't want to go, but the only way we can see an end to all this would be for them to actually relocate us somewhere else," she said.

Earlier this month the residents met Bathurst MP Gerard Martin who said he had passed on their concerns to the NSW Government.

"It's a really complex and unique situation. I've written to the Premier, the Minister for Planning and the Minister for Natural Resources and said we should have a whole-of-Government approach to this problem that they've got at Blackman's Flat," Mr Martin said.

Lithgow Council general manager Paul Anderson said he was aware of the request for relocation but rejected residents' suggestions their concerns have been ignored.

"I have a number of staff and councillors who are members of the community consultative committee for the mining operations in and around Blackman's Flat and they are raising the issues and concerns of the community," he said.

"I suppose I'm a bit of a loss as to how we'd actually manage that (relocation) process, but we'd be happy to be involved and assist where we can."

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recommendation 1: That the NSW Government investigate the terms of sale of Wallerawang Power Station to Energy Australia; explain to the NSW Public who will ultimately be responsible for the costs of decontaminating, remediating, and revegetating Kerosene Vale Ash Dam (KVAD) and Kerosene Vale Ash repository (KVAR); and provide an honest estimate of the true cost to the NSW taxpayer.

Recommendation 2: That the NSW Government investigate the Dams Safety Act 1978 (DS Act) in light of the sudden and unexpected closure of [Myuna Bay Sports and Recreation Centre](#) near Eraring Power Station's coal ash dump, and the appropriateness of classifying Coal ash dams as tailings dams. Further, that the Dams Safety Committee make all annual and five-yearly surveillance reports publicly available.

Recommendation 3: That the NSW Government stop relying on industry self-reporting on hazardous human health issues such as Coal-ash dust, air pollution, groundwater contamination, Brain-eating Virus's, and similar life-threatening issues. The standard response from Power Stations, certainly in the Lithgow area, has been cover-up, denial, claiming there is "no evidence", stating "we'll trust our \$250k Consultant thanks", shooting the messenger, and basically labelling anyone who raises a serious issue as a liar. Industry self-reporting does not work – the NSW Government must implement better environmental monitoring systems and regulatory frameworks.

Recommendation 4: That the NSW Government investigate the cost of properly rehabilitating the old Lithgow Power Station site in State Mine Gully.

Recommendation 5: That the NSW EPA declare the old Lithgow Power Station Site, Kerosene Vale Ash Dam (KVAD), Kerosene Vale Ash repository (KVAR), and Mount Piper Ash Emplacement Area as contaminated sites under the Contaminated Lands Management Act 1997, and serve the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment with an order to submit for the EPA's approval a plan of management of those lands.

Recommendation 6: That the NSW EPA investigate the spatial spread of leachate from Mount Piper Ash Emplacement Area into hydraulically connected old mine workings and groundwater aquifers in the area, including mine workings associated with the old Western Main Colliery, Eastern Main Colliery (Wallerawang) Colliery, Ivanhoe Colliery, Renown Mine, Invincible Colliery, and Baal Bone Colliery.

Recommendation 7: That the NSW EPA investigate the spatial spread of leachate from Kerosene Vale Ash Dam (KVAD) and Kerosene Vale Ash Repository (KVAR) into hydraulically connected underground mine workings associated with the old Newcom Colliery, Angus Place Colliery, Springvale Colliery, Fernbrook Colliery, and all other relevant mines.

Recommendation 8: That the NSW Government draws up a plan of action to stop leachate from Mount Piper Power Station Ash Emplacement Area leaking into hydraulically interconnected underground mine workings, groundwater aquifers, and surface water.

Recommendation 9: That the NSW Government draws up a plan of action to stop leachate from Kerosene Vale Ash Dam (KVAD) and Kerosene Vale Ash Repository (KVAR) leaking into hydraulically interconnected underground mine workings associated with the old Newcom Colliery, Angus Place Colliery, Springvale Colliery, Fernbrook Colliery, and other relevant mines., and from potentially contaminating 89 Bores listed on the DNR Bore Registry within a 10 km radius of the KVAD & KVAR.

Recommendation 10: That the NSW Government collaborate with relevant agencies to address noxious weeds on the old Lithgow Power Station coal ash/waste sites (particularly but not limited to Scotch Broom, Blackberry, Pampas Grass), and Kerosene Vale Ash Dam (KVAD) and Kerosene Vale Ash repository (KVAR) where Pampas Grass is a serious issue, however there are likely to be others.

Recommendation 11: That the NSW Government collaborate with relevant agencies to address Feral Goats and other animal pest species at Kerosene Vale Ash Repository (KVAR).

Recommendation 12: That the NSW Government establish financial assurance mechanisms to prevent Power Station owners from shirking responsibility for decontaminating and remediating coal ash sites (such as happened at the old Lithgow Power Station), such as a sinking funds and security deposits to cover the risk of long-term environmental degradation after power station decommissioning.

Recommendation 13: That the NSW EPA undertake an investigation into all coal ash generated in NSW to determine the environmental risks associated with all current and proposed uses, and whether these uses are appropriate due to the concentrations of metal/metalloids and risk of them leaching, and whether any meet the specifications for high volume sintered ash products. The EPA must then amend the Coal Ash Exemption 2014 accordingly to ensure all coal ash metal analyses and leach testing results are made public. The EPA must take a much more active role in determining the suitability of coal ash reuse.

Recommendation 14: That the NSW Government list coal ash as an assessable pollutant in Schedule 1 of the Protection of the Environment Operations (General) Regulation 2009, and impose a load based licence fee of at least \$20 a tonne on all coal ash disposed of in ash dams, landfills, and mine voids.

Recommendation 15: That the EPA make a public announcement of the risks to human health, livestock, fisheries, irrigated plants and crops of using groundwater identified by ERM and EPA at the five NSW coal-fired power stations as exceeding ANZECC drinking water, irrigation, and livestock guidelines.

Recommendation 16: That the EPA amend the EPL conditions for all NSW Power Stations to prevent the disposal of Asbestos waste (as is currently occurring at Kerosene Vale Ash Repository), to ensure that coal ash identified for reuse is not further contaminated with material that may diminish its suitability for reuse.

Recommendation 17: That the EPA amend the EPL conditions for all NSW Power Stations to prevent the disposal of highly toxic top & bottom ash from burning Municipal Waste in Incinerators/Waste to Energy Units (such as currently being proposed at Mount Piper Power Station), to ensure that coal ash identified for reuse is not further contaminated with material that may diminish its suitability for reuse.

Recommendation 18: That the EPA amends the EPL conditions for all NSW Power Stations to prevent the disposal of ash with a high carbon content, which apparently reduces the suitability of coal-ash for reuse in cement manufacture and for road re-surfacing.

CONCLUSION

We that the information provided above adequately reflects the seriousness of the coal ash issue for the local community in the Lithgow region.

Thankyou for providing this opportunity to contribute to this inquiry.

Yours faithfully

Chris Jonkers
Vice President
Lithgow Environment Group Inc.