

**Submission  
No 33**

**INQUIRY INTO PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT  
OPERATIONS AMENDMENT (CLEAN AIR) BILL 2021**

**Name:** Gary Blaschke OAM

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*The Director  
Portfolio Committee No.7  
Planning and Environment  
Parliament House  
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*4 June 2021*

## **SUBMISSION**

### **PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT OPERATIONS AMENDMENT (CLEAN AIR) BILL 2021**

It is obvious that the health of communities in regions surrounding ash dams and industrial sites throughout N.S.W. have simply been swept under the carpet and or totally ignored for decades by the authorities.

It is also apparent that the Environmental Protection Authority (E.P.A.) has failed in their duty to protect the community, as time after time licences approved by them are breached with punishments of tokenistic fines. Air Quality Alerts are announced by Environment NSW such as that for the Lower Hunter on Wednesday 19-5-21 19:00 which found the air quality had reached "**POOR or WORSE**" due to PM10 Particles.

The many recommendations of the Legislative Council Public Works Committee (Report 4 March 2021) Costs for remediation of sites containing coal ash repositories, supports the greater need for one industry alone to clean up their operations and condemns both the operations and processes of N.S.W. Health and the E.P.A.

Recommendations: No.2, 3,4, 6, 7, 14 &16 are testimony that this and many other industries have been able to self regulate or exceed any common sense law and inevitably impacted on human and environmental health for decades, as these laws are not strict enough, laws which allow licences to pollute whether it be water, land or AIR.

Issues such as, Orica (Botany Bay) having the second largest toxic groundwater plume in the southern hemisphere of Ethylene dichloride reaching the waters of Port Botany and the storage and cover-up of 15,000 tonnes of concentrated Hexachlorobenzene being placed in drums and hidden under a car park. Subsequently the company tried to export or dump it upon the German and Dutch people, yet were refused by their EPA's, as it still sits in Botany with no answers to remediation.

The former Copper smelter at Port Kembla was approved with a positive Environmental Impact Statement and all the requirements of each of the authorities. It soon became a massive community health issue with air polluting toxins causing many school children to contract cancers. It was subsequently shut down but the damage had been done, as the standards were either too little or not complied to or both.

Decades of air pollution from industries around Newcastle have flaunted air quality standards. Orica, BHP, Incitec and many others have introduced air pollution from industrial incinerators, steelworks, smelters, foundries, collieries, brickworks, storage facilities and uncovered coal haulage on trains passing through residential areas, to name a few.

Many power stations in N.S.W. have failed to keep up with the times and some antiquated stations today, do not conduct world's best practice by simply not having stack scrubbers installed to reduce PM2.5 particles and other gases such as Nitrogen/ Sulphur dioxides and Carbon monoxide discharging and covering regional communities.

Coal dust, ash plumes and odours have long been health and environmental issues for the Hunter, Lake Macquarie and Central Coast regions.

One of many recommendations of the coal ash inquiry (No.6), which states "that NSW Health immediately undertake an epidemiological assessment of health of residents near coal ash dams to establish the health impacts of coal ash by December 2022", is well overdue.

The Inquiry's committee commented... (3.66) ***"We are disappointed with the response by the N.S.W. E.P.A. and N.S.W. Health to community concerns about potential links between the circulation of additional metals in the AIR and waterways, and the impacts on health outcomes for the community. This response, in conjunction with the lack of research conducted to date on this matter, demonstrates a complete disregard by the government towards the health of its citizens"***.

The long term consequences in relation to the health of surrounding communities, is testimony to previous independent reports on Asthma in our children over the past three decades with identified cancer clusters being officially 6% above the N.S.W. average on the Central Coast alone.

We can only hope that whoever conducts the epidemiological assessment is independent from the authorities who have let us down for decades. You need not look further to find that coal ash and air pollution has impacted both visually and created many health related issues within communities close to power stations or coal ash dams around the world.

The health impacts from air pollution are well documented, specifically as with power station emissions and coal ash.

**ARSENIC** can cause nervous system damage, cardiovascular issues, urinary tract cancers from ingestion and lung cancer from inhalation with skin cancer from absorption.

**MERCURY** exposure poses particular risk to children and foetuses with nervous system damage and developmental defects.

**LEAD** exposure may cause brain swelling, kidney disease, cardiovascular problems, nervous system damage and death.

**CHROMIUM** ingested can cause stomach ulcers, intestinal ulcers, stomach cancer, anaemia and if frequent inhalation is to occur will generate asthma, wheezing and possible lung cancer.

3.

Other emissions of toxins from many industrial sources such as nitrogen dioxide, nitric oxide, sulphur dioxide and solid particles be them PM2.5 or PM10 are causing detrimental impacts on our surrounding communities and beyond.

Issues that are often overlooked are the impact on our drinking water supplies as most dams are simply open to the elements. Others being our ocean, lakes and bushlands as many of our industrial sites and power station sit on water bodies used to help with cooling processes or are surrounded by bushland which are all our main source of Oxygen.

**I have personal concerns that air pollution where I live (Lake Munmorah) and beyond is causing many health issues in children and adults. I began writing about cancers in the local tabloid some six years ago after hearing of two local pre-schoolers being diagnosed with brain cancer and two teenagers passing away, nine months apart from spinal tumours.**

**Anonymous phone calls from a primary school in Mannering Park alerted me to the many cancers in the local children including brain cancer and blood disorders. Individuals were pulling me up in the street to tell me of their touch with either cancer or asthma and then out of the blue, I was diagnosed with three specific cancers.**

**Being a non-drinker or smoker and having surfed for over fifty years, I believed I lived a relatively healthy life, yet three cancers all at the same time set off many alarm bells. Torrens University had conducted a Cancer Cluster report on nine cancers prevalent on the Central Coast in 2017 for the Cancer Institute and found the region around the Central Coast had a minimum of 6% above the average for N.S.W. with the nine cancers studied.**

**Suburbs such as Woy Woy had breast cancer prevalent, The Entrance had melanomas, yet Wyong , Gorokan and Charmhaven had all nine cancers prevalent. All three suburbs are in line with prevailing winds from both Eraring and Vales Point power stations and ash dams containing over 200 Million tonnes of stored ash.**

**Recent data obtained from the Central Coast Health Authority on asthma presentations in Wyong and Gosford hospitals over a one year period (2019-2020) showed children alone between 0-15 with acute and life threatening asthma disorders numbered **1,142 admissions.****

**The region has one official E.P.A. monitoring station for the Central Coast some twelve kilometres south of Vales Point power station at Wyong racecourse. A recently new station has been built to the north of Vales Point and east of Eraring power stations at Mirabooka, yet the upper hunter has 20, Sydney 24, Illawarra 8, regional N.S.W. 6 and the Central Coast having **only 1 official monitor at Wyong.****

4.

Any form of air pollution is predominately invisible, yet if it were purple the community would be up in arms. The following photo shows the number of children (650) in the Lower Lake Macquarie and Central Coast regions, living near a power station, having chronic asthma, yet the lake itself and air look to be clean and aesthetically pleasing.



*Until this...*



5.

Environmental Justice Australia, Nature Conservation Council N.S.W., Lake Macquarie and Central Coast Coal ash Community Alliance Inc., Keep Lake Macquarie Clean, Greenpeace, Australian Conservation Foundation, Doctors for the Environment, Lung Foundation Australia, Healthy Futures, Sustainable Neighbourhood Network and the Hunter Community Environment Centre cannot all be wrong when it comes to the impact on communities from poor air quality.

Reports by local tabloids indicate that the E.P.A. has agreed to public consultation before determining whether to let Vales Point Power Station extend its Environmental Protection Licence for another five years and in light of what we know or don't know from the lack of health research conducted, it should not be their findings which make the decision.

I as an Australian citizen, ratepayer of the Central Coast and member of the Coal ash Community Alliance Inc. support the proposed Protection of the Environment Operations Amendment (Clean Air) Bill 2021.

Yours sincerely,

*Gary Blaschke*

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Lake Munmorah N.S.W. 2259