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The Hon Tony Burke MP
Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
<Tony.Burke.MP@environment.gov.au>

Dear Minister Burke

Maules Creek Coal Mine Decision

The Clarence Environment Centre has maintained a shop-front in Grafton for over 22 years, and has a proud history of environmental advocacy. We have also had numerous cases over the years where the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC) has been tested, but regret to report that thus far in our Northern Rivers Region, we have not managed so save a single matter of national environmental significance. Therefore we feel impelled to comment further your upcoming decision relating to the proposed Maules Creek coal mine.

Over a year ago, in September 2011, The Clarence Environment Centre wrote to you in relation to the review of the EPBC Act, and made the following observation:

*The true effectiveness of the EPBC Act, and Federal Government resolve, is about to be tested. Right now the massive Maules Creek coal mine is proposed for the Leard State Forest near Boggabri. **Of the some 2,000 hectares of forest that the mining operation will destroy, more than a quarter is made up of no less than five Critically Endangered Ecological Communities, Box Gum Woodland; White Box – White Cypress Pine Grassy Woodland; Yellow Box – Blakely's Red Gum Woodland; Plains Grassland, and Derived Native Grassland.***

*Burning the coal from that mine will likely have a devastating impact on the planet through its contribution to climate change, but it seems that even that fact will not save any of those critically endangered Matters of National Environmental Significance (MNES) from total annihilation. The developers proposal to rehabilitate other land as an offset, a process that their Ecological Assessment admits will take 200 years, will likely fail because global warming will ensure those woodland will never reach maturity. In short, we believe that approving that mine, along with the dozens more that are planned, will likely spell the end of all those communities, along with the many other species that depend upon them. **The moment of truth is approaching when the Federal Government will be called upon to prove that the EPBC Act is in any way effective in protecting MNES.***

Well that moment of truth has arrived.

The reality is that, if the Maules Creek, and the two other proposed mines are approved, over 5,000ha of Leard State Forest, the **largest stand of native vegetation in the Liverpool Plains**, will be destroyed over the next 21 years.

The three open-pit coal mines will together mine 435 million tonnes of coal over their life-time (23 million tonnes per annum, or 20% of Newcastle's port throughput), and will cause a 10% increase in Australia's greenhouse emissions.

Australia has committed to reducing our emissions by 5% by 2020, a target your Government has already admitted will only be met by purchasing credits off-shore. Even so, the International Energy Agency identified in its 2012 Outlook report, that the failure to move immediately to the use of renewable energy will lead to runaway climate change, a 6 degrees of warming within 90 years.

If the Maules Creek coal mine is approved, it will lead to:

- A drop of 5 metres in the aquifer
- A loss of critically five endangered ecological communities of Box-Gum Woodland.
- A massive loss of Koala habitat.
- A loss of habitat for, Swift Parrots, Spotted-Tailed Quolls, Yellow-Bellied Sheath-Tail Bats, Masked Owls - all up, 34 threatened species.
- A loss of farmland - our food providers. With over 500 million people starving or suffering malnutrition world-wide, this cannot be justified.
- Unacceptable social impacts on the quiet village of Maules Creek.
- Neighbours suffering similar levels of health problems as are being experienced in the Hunter Valley, and the additional throughput from the port of Newcastle, will further exacerbate those Hunter Valley health problems.
- A catastrophic level of climate change.

As a result of these impacts, both local and at a global level, and the wholesale destruction of matters of National Ecological Significance, we urge you to reject this monstrous proposal.

Yours sincerely

John Edwards
Honorary Secretary.