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The Hon Tony Burke MP
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Dear Sir

The Boggabri Coal Mine Proposal

Introduction

The last two months have seen Australia devastated by weather related disasters, ranging from floods and cyclones to heat waves and bushfires, on an unprecedented scale. We are not alone. The ABC's Lateline program revealed that world-wide there were 850 recorded climate catastrophes in 2010.

For more than 30 years, literally thousands of climatologists, and scientists working in related fields around the world, have widely predicted that climate change, resulting from the build-up of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, will see an increase in the number and intensity of extreme climate events in exactly the way they have.

The consensus is that the greenhouse gas build-up is the direct result of burning fossil fuels over the past 200 to 300 years, and as a result, many countries committed to cut emissions. Australia's Hawke Government was one of the first, with a target set to reduce emissions to 1980 levels by the year 2000. However, not only was that target not met, but emissions have continued to rise from between 2% and 3% per year ever since, and just last month figures were released showing emissions levels trending upwards well beyond the current 2020 target date.

Australia is not alone, with similar upward trends occurring around the world.

Three years ago Sir Nicholas Stern, an economist employed by the British Government to assess the economic impacts of climate change, famously claimed that the cost of acting on climate change, would be dwarfed by the cost of not acting. That warning was subsequently echoed by Australia's Ross Garnaut, but despite all the evidence, including upward trending temperatures and universal melting of glaciers, those warnings have been ignored.

While some parliamentarians concede that climate change is real, others, particularly on the opposition benches, assert it is "bull shit", and claim that even if climate change is real, Australia's minuscule contribution makes no difference, allowing them to wipe their hands of all responsibility despite Australia being the world's largest coal exporter, i.e. the greatest exporter of pollution.

Recent figures show that emissions from coal-fired electricity production fell in 2010, the result of programs such as solar grid feed, and rising electricity costs. However, the Government made a ludicrous decision to axe many of the climate change programs to pay for the damage caused by the natural disasters.

Through all of this, the export coal industry continues to expand, with the NSW Government supporting the doubling of coal exports from this State. Queensland and Western Australia are doing likewise, with governments at all levels seemingly blinded to the consequences.

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Coal exploration and the development of new mines in NSW has reached an all-time high, and with all the evidence highlighting the insanity of continuing down the road to self-destruction, it seems ridiculous that we now need to resort to arguing against the opening of a new mine simply on the basis that it will have an unacceptable impact on threatened species and endangered ecological communities like the Grassy White Box Woodlands at Maules Creek in the Liverpool Plains.

Those threatened communities may already have been doomed when we chose not to act on climate change 30 years ago. Nevertheless, we cannot stand by and watch the proposed destruction of natural habitats around the very foothills of Mt Kaputar, near Narrabri, where four huge open-cut mines are now planned.

This area is much more than just a food bowl. It is a diverse, productive landscape adjacent to the Nandewar Ranges, where farming and conservation have gradually achieved a kind of equilibrium that will be utterly destroyed by open-cut coal mining.

The heart of Maules Creek is Leard State Forest, the largest single remnant of native vegetation left on the heavily cleared Liverpool Plains. It contains one of the largest remaining stands of the nationally endangered Grassy White Box community, supporting hundreds of fauna species, many of them listed as threatened.

It is also home to a range of newly-discovered and unique freshwater invertebrates that depend on healthy groundwater.

The Tarrawonga mine in the Maules Ck area has already been approved, and a second mine has commenced but is now seeking a major continuation and extension (Boggabri Coal). A third mine, Maules Ck, is in the planning phase and a fourth, Goonbri, currently has an exploration lease.

Collectively, these mines will open-cut almost half of Leard State Forest which provides critical ecoservices and other benefits to the community, which will be destroyed forever. In total, it is estimated the four mines may destroy 5,067 hectares of native vegetation.

The Boggabri Coal mine is currently undergoing assessment by the NSW Department of Planning to both continue its current mine and to expand further. If approved, that mine alone will open-cut 1,400 hectares of irreplaceable remnant forest.

Unfortunately, we are missed the closing date for submissions, but feel strongly that we should try to have our concerns heard. We must have change. Not only is coal being mined in ever-increasing volumes to add to atmospheric pollution, but native forests are being destroyed in the process.

Therefore we urge the Federal Government to take a long-term view and immediately move to renewable energy, and place a moratorium on all new coal mine developments, for the sake of future generations.

Yours sincerely
John Edwards
Honorary Secretary.