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# **SUBMISSION**

## **To the Tarrawonga coal mine expansion proposal**

### INTRODUCTION

The last two years 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 have 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.

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 Government 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 and incentives 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.

## THE TARRAWONGA PROPOSAL

The proposed expansion of the Tarrawonga Coal Mine is just one of 3 enormous coal mine proposals, currently threatening the highly sensitive Leard State forest with its multiple critically endangered ecological communities, yet there does not appear to be any requirement for the proponents to consider the cumulative impacts on these communities.

Specific concerns include:

1. The proposed "permanent" re-alignment of Goonbri Creek which is a 4th order stream in good to excellent condition, will turn a natural asset into a drain. The mine should halt at least 300m short of Goonbri Creek and leave the creek in its current, natural and permanent location. Goonbri Creek is a major component of the groundwater recharge for the area of Barbers Lagoon and Boggabri itself.
2. The clearing of 397 Ha of Native Vegetation including some vegetation in the Leard State Forest, the consequence of which will increase the cumulative impact on the Leard Forest from the Boggabri Coal and Maules Creek Coal mines. This Forest is PUBLIC LAND and is being provided to a largely foreign owned company for private profit.
3. The project area will be rehabilitated by spreading a thin layer of topsoil over the overburden embankment. This is insufficient to ensure the water holding capability will sustain White Box and other threatened native trees which are currently found in the area.
4. We are told that changes to the surface water flows from the existing mine, due to the overburden embankments, has directed large volumes of mine water from within the project area onto the flood plain during the Nov 2011 and Feb 2012 floods. The increased project area in the Goonbri Creek Catchment due to the mine expansion will further exasperate this issue.
5. The plan to leave a huge hole where there was native vegetation is not best practice. The void does not return the land to its pre-mining land capability and creates an evaporative pump that permanently have a negative impact on ground water.
6. The water contained in the final void will increase in toxicity and be a threat to native animals in the area and as shown in the recent flood event could be a major threat to the floodplain.

The Gunnedah area is much more than 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 Leard State Forest is 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.

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.

#### IN CONCLUSION

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 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.  
Clarence Environment Centre.