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Submission

to

Department of Planning

on

Port Waratah Coal Services' proposed new coal export terminal at Newcastle

Compiled by John Edwards
Honorary Secretary

Submission to Department of Planning on Port Waratah Coal Services' proposed new coal export terminal at Newcastle

Preamble.

The Clarence Environment Centre has maintained a shop-front in Grafton for over 22 years, and has a proud record of environmental advocacy. Therefore, because the appropriate provision of energy is at the very core of the solution to global warming, we are compelled to comment on the above proposal which will facilitate the escalation of greenhouse gas emissions around the world, and therefore contribute to the likelihood of catastrophic climate change.

The Clarence Environment Centre believes that Climate Change is real. Major catastrophic climate events have occurred with increased frequency over the past few years, all of which have been deemed to have broken all existing records, such as Hurricane Katrina, the Queensland floods and Cyclone Yasi, record floods in Pakistan and Thailand, deadly fires in Victoria, killer tornadoes in the USA, and heat waves across western and central Australia, just to name a handful.

This year alone, we have seen cyclones in India; the hottest start to a new year in over 100 years in South Australia; unstoppable fires in Slovenia, and the destruction of over 2,000 sq kilometres of bush and grassland in Chile; all-time coldest January temperatures in central west NSW, and a deep freeze in eastern Europe killing more than 80 people, while parts of England experienced their driest year in over 70 years.

14 deadly tornadoes tore across 7 US states, destroying 2 small towns, and killing dozens of people, in what was described as an "unusual early season event". Predictions are for a record tornado season, with the largest, most destructive twister ever recorded, and only this week 120 tornadoes touched down in Oklahoma, across 400km over a 5 hour period.

Heavy rain and snow has caused flooding and landslides that have killed thousands around the world in the first 3 months of 2012, the result of higher evaporation rates as global temperatures rise. Deadly floods, many breaking all time records have been reported in the Netherlands, Philippines, Chile, Fiji, the Danube in Europe, and Australia where St George in Southern Queensland has suffered its third one in 100 year flood in two years.

Exceptionally warm March weather in the USA has seen headlines reporting "6,000 records broken" with: *"We've seen an amazing, historic run of record warmth in March 2012. It's been the talk of towns from Minnesota and Michigan to Tennessee and Georgia"*.

A huge avalanche in Kashmir, and an exceptional hail storm leaving 4 foot deep ice drifts in Texas, round out this year's extreme weather events so far, and these are only a fraction of the extraordinary events that have occurred around the world. YES climate change is a reality.

Direct impacts of the coal loading facility

We could focus on the direct and indirect health impacts of this 4th coal loading facility such as:

- It will facilitate the expansion of coal mining in the Hunter and Liverpool Plains, which will double the dust and the noise for communities already affected by the coal trains in Newcastle and beyond,
- it will double the pollution impact of the coal exported from NSW that has already seen life expectancy levels in the Hunter Valley significantly lower than the rest of Australia,

- will see an additional 41 coal trains daily through the Hunter Valley, increasing dust and particulates, increasing asthma and other respiratory ailments that have already seen the Hunter Valley suffering significantly higher levels than elsewhere in Australia,
- will add to pollution that affects all major body organ systems and contributes to morbidity and mortality,

We could also focus on other social impacts such as:

- following construction, the coal terminal will not provide additional employment,
- it is likely to result in the loss of tourist dollars,
- it is likely to have negative impacts on recreational fishing and boating,

We could detail the potential environmental impacts such as,

- the destruction of endangered ecological communities and habitat for threatened species, including the Green and Golden Bell Frog and the Australasian Bittern. The Environmental Assessment for the project fails to meet the requirements set out by both the State and Federal agencies, with the proposal representing an unacceptable risk to the Australasian Bittern.
- the risks of mobilising toxic contaminants on Kooragang Island, the former BHP Steelworks site, and in the South Arm of the Hunter River. Too little is known about the risks to ensure the communities of Newcastle will be protected from toxic spills through seepage and accidents. There is no comprehensive plan for remediation of the sites.
- The destruction of internationally significant wetlands that provide critical habitat for a range of aquatic native fauna. It will see the loss of habitat at “Deep Pond”, which will be lost to the project, and its proximity to the Hunter estuary Ramsar site, which is relied on by at least 11 species of migratory birds, that are protected by international treaties. Most of Deep Pond, the only freshwater refuge in the Hunter estuary, would be lost to this project, and
- an area within the site is currently part of the National Parks estate, and provides irreplaceable habitat for migratory shore birds. The proposal will mean loss of habitat and disruption to an ecologically significant proportion of a population of four migratory shorebird species listed under international conservation conventions.

However, given the climate change implications itemised above, we consider the most damaging consequences of building yet another coal loader is that,

- it will facilitate many more large coal mines (the equivalent of at least 15 'mega-pits') in the Hunter and Liverpool Plains which threaten food and water security by destroying prime agricultural land, irreversibly damaging ground water systems, polluting waterways and, in areas like the Leard State Forest, will see wholesale destruction of native forest including 5 nationally listed critically endangered ecological communities,
- and more importantly, the coal exported through that one extra loader, would provide the capacity to feed at least 15 more large power stations around the world emitting 288 million tones of carbon pollution each year.

Rationale

The UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, and the CSIRO are now reporting that $\frac{3}{4}^{\circ}\text{C}$ global warming has now occurred and predict a further 1 to 5 degree warming by 2075, effectively bringing the end date for those figures forward by 25 years. Atmospheric carbon is now at its highest level in 600,000 years, and accelerating the onset of climate change.

In February this year The International Energy Agency (IEA) identified in its Outlook 2012, that, by continuing business as usual, the world is currently on track for 6 degrees warming by 2100. That would result in catastrophic climate change.

The Australian Government's Energy White Paper, January 2012, clearly shows it plans business as usual, identifying that we still have many decades of coal and gas reserves, predicting that exports are set to rise steadily for the foreseeable future, and boasting that, as well as being the world's largest coal exporter, Australia will soon be the world's second largest exporter of another polluting fossil fuel, gas.

Recent government policies have seen significant cuts to renewable energy subsidies and programs, and the NSW Government has walked away from its 20% renewable energy target by 2020. At the same time it has granted the highly polluting coal seam gas (CSG) industry a five year royalty free incentive, which has seen a massive increase in CSG exploration across the state. According to the IEA, if the world wishes to meet the 450 parts per million target for atmospheric carbon, no further coal fired power stations should be built after 2017. Therefore the ongoing burning of that additional coal and gas will ensure runaway global warming and catastrophic climate change.

We believe a statement by the British "Eradicate Ecocide" movement is very pertinent. That organisation plans to shortly introduce a new law of ecocide to the United Nations, and makes the point that: *"Not one Member State can justify putting humanity at risk when the whole of civilisation stands on the brink of disaster"*.

In conclusion

In consideration of all of the above, we believe there can be no justification for the construction of a 4th coal loading facility, or for approving the applications for the dozens of new coal mines that are in the pipeline across NSW and Queensland, while we strongly believe coal seam gas mining should be banned altogether.

Therefore we strongly urge the Department of Planning to reject the plan for the proposed coal loading facility.

We thank the Minister for this opportunity to comment.

Yours sincerely
John Edwards