

Additional information for submission to NSW Planning – Dalton Power Project – MOD 1

Gunning District Association OBJECTS to the extension.

- 1) Gunning District Association (GDA) objects to the extension of the lapsing date of the conditional approval for the Dalton Power Project (DPP) by 2 years.
- 2) GDA represents residents, businesses and not-for-profit organisations in Gunning, Dalton, Collector and districts. GDA's role is to promote, support and foster the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of Gunning and district. GDA is broad-based consultative organisation.
- 3) GDA is a consultative organisation and has prepared this submission within a less than ideal timeframe. GDA has not been contacted by AGL. AGL failed to meet the Conditions of Consent prescribed in Schedule D of the 2012 approval. AGL has not implemented strategies to deliver Community Information, Consultation and Involvement.
- 4) Research and analysis underpinning the original DPP proposal is over seven (7) years old. Mainstream views regarding combustion-based power generation have shifted markedly in this time as has the social make-up of potentially impacted communities. AGL has requested the extension to conduct basic research, material to a further application ("MOD 2"), under repealed legislation and without community consultation. The continued uncertainty surrounding the Project, exacerbated by the application to extend the lapse date, and a lack of information and communication from AGL, has negatively impacted the social and economic wellbeing of Gunning, Dalton and district communities.

Research and analysis underpinning the original proposal is over seven (7) years old.

- 5) The original application was approved in July 2012 and based on data drawn from investigations undertaken up to that date. Data which is over seven years old does not reflect the current environmental, economic and social climate; nor does it take account of research, discoveries and changes to local communities in the ensuing years. An extension to the approval would result in intergenerational inequity, with many young people, currently too young to vote feeling impotent in determining their future.
 - AGL has suggested that an extension would *"result in negligible environmental impacts"*. Given that no additional research or evidence would be conducted or reviewed following an extension, AGL is not correct. For example, the Southern Pygmy Perch, a Critically Endangered Species in NSW, has recently been discovered in the Oolong Creek catchment, the same catchment in which the proposed AGL plant will be located. The NSW Department of Primary Industries, Gunning District Landcare and local landholders are urgently working on a Recovery Action Plan for Southern Pygmy Perch across the district. Any proposed extension would not take account of this Recovery Action Plan. Further, the previously believed to be extinct Golden Bell Frog has also been recorded in the area and activities are underway to identify further colonies in the area directly impacted by the DPP.
 - AGL has suggested that *"extending the lapse date to review the project and enable recommencement of community and stakeholder engagement will provide maximum transparency for the local community in relation to the future of the DPP"*. This proposed community consultation is contingent on the creation of a Community Consultative Committee to be set up *"during a MOD 2 process"*. AGL has not met the Conditions of

Consent prescribed in Schedule D of the 2012 approval. AGL has not implemented strategies to deliver Community Information, Consultation and Involvement. An extension to the lapse date prolongs uncertainty, rather than improving transparency. Attempting to process the application under Part 3A “transitional” decreases transparency due to the justified public mistrust of use of Part 3A of the legislation.

- AGL has suggested that “*extending the lapse date would not change the positive socio-economic benefits from the DPP.*” Uncertainty surrounding the DPP, as well as the Application to Extend the Lapsing Date has already negatively impacted the socio-economic environment of Gunning, Dalton and district communities. In 2016, the three regional Councils in the area (Goulburn Mulwaree, Yass Valley and Upper Lachlan) developed a joint regional strategic plan. The Councils’ Regional Strategic Plan states: “Overall, the Plan aims to grow the economy and jobs throughout the South East and Tablelands by maximising the potential for tourism, agriculture and renewable energy opportunities.” Extending the lapse date of the Dalton Power Project (DPP), so that the continued uncertainty surrounding the project now overlaps with implementation of the strategic plan, is inconsistent with all aspects of this strategy, as explained below.
 - a. **The extension of approval for the DPP would have a high negative impact on tourism.** The threat of having a large polluting power station such as the DPP 3km away from, and within sight of, the village of Dalton is inconsistent with the principal Upper Lachlan Shire tourism branding of natural beauty and quaint village heritage; “The Shire of Villages”.
 - b. **An extension of the DPP approval would have a high negative impact on the agriculture industry that provides the largest employment opportunities in the region.** Extending the approval for the DPP will threaten agriculture in the region as it will decrease the attractiveness of the region for the principal growth market of lifestyle farmers. Based on information in a Land and Environment Court hearing in Upper Lachlan Shire of June 2016 [File No. 2016/00166500] over a ten-year period traditional rural farm purchase at the Gunning Agriculture and Water Solutions business had declined from about 70% of gross profit to 32% of gross profit with the shortfall made up by “lifestyle” residents. This growth enabled the local businesses to survive and continue to provide services to the rural community. The uncertainty that would be created by extending the approval period for the DPP would decrease incentive for the growth market of lifestyle farmers.
 - c. **An extension of approval for the DPP would have a high negative impact on renewable energy opportunities.** Prolonging the approval of the DPP is inconsistent with the Council’s stated aim of promoting renewable energy opportunities, as it increases investment uncertainty for renewable energy projects.
- 6) In 2016, an extensive strategic planning process conducted by Upper Lachlan Shire Council, Goulburn-Mulwaree Council and Yass Valley Council revealed that environmental and conservation values are highly regarded by residents, businesses and special interest groups across the region (<http://www.upperlachlan.nsw.gov.au/regional-community-strategic-plan>)

This most recent Regional community consultation and resulting Strategy directly aligns with the 2016 Draft South East and Southern Tablelands Regional Plan prepared by the NSW Government to set “a 20-year blueprint for the future of the region, containing goals and actions that aim to build a strong, diverse economy and resilient, sustainable communities.”

In the resulting report and strategic plan the Southern Tablelands Regional Vision for Environment was:

“We appreciate our range of rural landscapes and habitats, and act as custodians of the natural environment for future generations.” The following strategies were developed -

- EN1- Protect and enhance the existing natural environment, including flora and fauna native to the region.
 - EN3 - Protect and rehabilitate waterways and catchments.
 - EN4 - Maintain a balance between growth, development and environmental protection through sensible planning.
- 7) At the time of the Approval of the DPP, ULSC had in place the Social and Community Plan 2013-2018. (<http://www.upperlachlan.nsw.gov.au/planning/strategies-plans-policies/social-and-community-plan-2013-2018>) When this Plan is compared with the 2016 Regional Community Strategic Plan new aspirations of Gunning and District stakeholders, and more broadly, Southern Tablelands stakeholders, are demonstrated. The new plan was developed assuming a lapse date of July 2017 for the DPP. Given this new research **GDA requests the Minister reject the application for an extension.**

Uncertainty surrounding the Project and approval process under repealed Part3A of along with a subsequent lack of information and communication from AGL has negatively impacted the social and economic wellbeing of Gunning, Dalton and district communities.

- 8) Intergenerational inequity is a key concern for young people within Gunning and District communities. Gunning District Association’s youth members have expressed shock and disbelief that a planning permission granted through a flawed process undertaken when they were small children could now be extended to affect them well into their adult lives. This question was raised by two sixteen year olds “Don’t they understand climate change is real and we really need to do something about it now?”. If an extension were to be granted these young people would see the project approval extended without their views and concerns being addressed at all.
- 9) In April 2017, Lifeline and CRT Gunning conducted a mental health training session on how to recognise and respond to the signs of crisis. This training was attended by over 50 individuals (approximately 5% of the population of Gunning and Dalton). Depression and suicide rates in rural Australia are over three times those in urban areas. Stressors such as anxiety and uncertainty surrounding developments such as the DPP are negatively impacting the Gunning and Dalton communities. AGL’s failure to meet the Consent Conditions of the Approval have exacerbated this issue. It is unreasonable to expose the community to further stress and anxiety from an extended lapse date when AGL do not have a credible plan for the project at this stage.

Mainstream views regarding combustion-based power generation have shifted markedly as has the social make-up of potentially impacted communities.

- 10) Upper Lachlan Shire is one of the few agricultural and lifestyle local government areas within NSW to record and forecast genuine growth over the mid to long term. 16.4% growth in residential development is forecast in the Gunning/Dalton district alone up until 2036 (<http://forecast.id.com.au/upper-lachlan/residential-development>). Given that the main reason for moving to ULSC LGA is a lifestyle choice, and that housing affordability remains reasonable, a development that does not consult with these new residents, nor reflects and supports lifestyle aspirations of those moving here seems at odds with the NSW Governments plans for a stronger region.

Conclusion

GDA requests the Minister reject the application for an extension to the DPP. The original application was approved using the now repealed Part 3A of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (EP&A Act). GDA objects to the process to date, given the lack of time for consultation with affected communities and AGL's failure to comply with the Consent Conditions. Continued uncertainty regarding the DPP is causing unreasonable stress and anxiety, economic loss and insecurity and instability within our rural communities.