



Islington Village Community Group Inc.

history diversity community

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Mr Sam Haddad - Director-General
GPO Box 39,
Sydney NSW 2001

Dear Sir/Madam,

PROPOSED NEW FOURTH COAL TERMINAL (T4) NEWCASTLE OBJECTION

Islington Village Community Group (**IVCG**) thanks you for the opportunity to further respond and comment to this insidious development proposal for the port of Newcastle.

The reduction in capacity of the proposal from 120Mt to 70Mt does not satisfy our group and we note that the Port Waratah Coal Services' (PWCS) *Response to submissions and Preferred Project Report (RS/PPR)* does not adequately address the issues raised by submissions to the Environmental Assessment (EA) and community concerns. We believe that the T4 project will have significant and unacceptable impacts. Therefore IVCG objects to the fourth Newcastle coal terminal (T4) being approved and built. The unacceptable impacts that IVCG wish to put forward includes:

- 1. Global warming:** The burning of an additional 70Mt of coal a year that adds additional carbon dioxide to the atmosphere is unacceptable and environmental vandalism. This will further add to Australia's total annual GHG emissions and many sources of information and science support reductions in the total amount of global coal demand by 2016, if capping predicted increase in worldwide temperatures are to be achieved. And these estimations are reported as being achieved before the construction and impacts of the T4 proposal. Australia should prefer to leave a legacy of environmental sustainability for future generations.
- 2. The Hunter wetlands:** Construction of T4 is proposed for the edge of the Hunter Estuary National Park. The park we believe will be reduced by 18.5ha to facilitate this project. The project will also develop lands held by OEH under Part 11 of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act* which is legislated for conservation. This area includes Swan Pond. The response to submissions does not address the conflict and possible illegality of using lands owned and managed under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act* for industrial development. We are aware that negotiations were underway to give or sell this land to the Port Corporation. No update on this process is provided. The Hunter estuary is an internationally recognised wetland protected by the Ramsar Convention [1]. The estuary is already heavily impacted by industry. The offset strategy proposed by PWCS cannot compensate for T4's proposed impacts.
- 3. Endangered species:** The Hunter Estuary supports 112 species of waterbirds and nationally and internationally listed threatened species (listed as endangered under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 and listed as vulnerable on the IUCN Red List), including:
 - ✓ the Australasian bittern (*Botaurus poiciloptilus*); and
 - ✓ the green and golden bell frog (*Litoria aurea*); and
 - ✓ the estuary stingray (*Dasyatis fluviatorum*).

Important habitats that will be impacted by T4 include Deep pond, Railway pond, Bittern pond and Swan pond. This destruction and loss is totally unacceptable to this community group.

a. **Deep Pond:** This freshwater drought refuge supports at least 11 species of migratory birds recorded above the threshold of the Australian flyway population for three migratory shorebird species. 600 sharp-tailed sandpipers, 450 curlew sandpipers and 270 marsh sandpipers are recorded. T4 will destroy 80 per cent of Deep Pond, a very significant impact to habitat and simply unacceptable to our community group.

b. **Swan Pond:** 2.3 hectares of Swan Pond will be destroyed by T4. Swan Pond also exceeds the threshold of the Australian flyway population for three migratory shorebird species, including records of 1,482 sharp-tailed sandpipers, 152 marsh sandpipers and 78 common greenshanks. Swan Pond is public land, owned and managed by the National Parks Service under Part 11 of the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Act. It is part of a highly successful long-term restoration project, the Kooragang Wetland Rehabilitation Project (KWRP) and has been the site of significant hours of volunteer labour by the local bird watching club. This total destruction to accommodate T4 is simply unacceptable to our community group.

c. **Offsets:** T4 will destroy 28ha of habitat known to support a population of the nationally threatened Australasian bittern. The PPR proposes a highly experimental proposal to build and create habitat for both the migratory shorebirds and Australasian bittern. Despite success in creating new habitat for Green and golden bell frogs, it is not known if this proposal will succeed for the bird species. It is crucial that no clearing or construction begins before this offset site is established, and shown to be successfully adopted and used by the species concerned. The Commonwealth environment department (**SEWPaC**) state in their submission to the EA that avoidance and mitigation are the primary strategies for managing potential impacts of a proposed action and while offsets can help to achieve long term conservation outcomes, they are not intended to make proposals with unacceptable impacts acceptable. IVCG supports this statement and stance.

In our view, the proposed habitat areas at Brundee (near Nowra) and Ellalong Lagoon (near Cessnock) do nothing to offset impacts on species occurring in the Hunter estuary. The Ellalong Lagoon offset area proposed is 40km from the project area and provides different habitat attributes to that of the T4 project area. The proposed Brundee offset area is located approx. 250km from the project area so cannot contribute to the conservation of biodiversity values present in the Hunter estuary or offset impacts on them. The proposed Tomago offset area currently provides suitable wetland habitat attributes but it's acceptance as an offset area as a result of the T4 project will further contribute to the significant net loss of wetlands in the Hunter estuary. IVCG urges that any proposed species habitat restoration in offset areas, such as Green and Golden Bell Frog habitat in the proposed Tomago offset area, should be first demonstrated to be effective before any impacts on existing habitat areas are considered.

The reservation of suitable habitat for respective species elsewhere does nothing to protect these species or ecological communities in the Hunter region where they are significant in a local and regional ecological context and only contributes further to overall loss across the distribution range or to the extinction risk.

d. **Green and Golden Bell Frog:** The T4 project area covers a significant proportion of the existing Green and Golden Bell Frog habitat in the Hunter estuary and it is highly likely that the majority of the population in the project area will be adversely impacted due to removal of key habitat for this species. There is no certainty that the proposed management measures for Green and Golden Bell Frog within the T4 site or habitat creation at the proposed Tomago offset area will be effective in protecting the species in the region. We understand that physical relocation of this population is not possible due to disease present in the colony.

e. **Ramsar wetland values:** Little has changed between the Environmental Assessment and the PPR in terms of the proposed degradation of Ramsar wetland values through the removal of existing estuarine habitat. Significant habitat is known to be present within the T4 project area and this cannot be adequately compensated by the proposed mitigation measures and offset strategies.

4. **Ground and surface water:** There is substantial uncertainty around the impacts of proposed ground and surface water management during construction and operation due to contamination issues or inherent differences in water quality between/within the site & surrounding habitats. Therefore the precautionary principle should apply to management of these aspects.

5. **Air quality:** Newcastle and the Hunter Valley communities are impacted by dust from the mining, transport and stockpiling of coal. These impacts will increase significantly with the addition of a further 70Mt of coal to the export chain. It is calculated that approximately 7,000 additional trips of trains consisting of 80 wagons will occur between the Hunter mines and the port and back again, this will substantially add to PM10 emissions in Newcastle and the Hunter Valley.

There is already significant data for measurements of PM10 in the air across the Hunter, exceedences incurred across the upper and lower Hunter region and the known impacts of diesel on people due to its known carcinogenic properties. The RT/PPR air quality modelling continues to use 2010 as a base year, despite NSW Health challenging the validity of using this as a base line when the data from other years raises concern over this as the realistic baseline for modelling future particulate levels. This **must** be discarded and a more reflective baseline developed for the assessment process.

Significant other work and study has been undertaken by other organisations and groups on the impacts of dust and dust levels present in and around the Hunter valley. This includes the recent (although discredited) Australian Rail Track Corporation (**ARTC**) study and the Coal Terminal Action Group (**CTAG**) studies. It is therefore puzzling why the RT/PPR does not address air quality issues from rail transport returning to the Upper Hunter Valley. It has been shown clearly by the CTAG studies that significant particle pollution is emitted by empty coal wagons returning to mines.

The RT/PPR continues to focus on air quality impacts within 20m of the rail corridor. Data collected reports approximately 100 homes only falling within this area between Muswellbrook and Newcastle. Data collected also reports that there are over 30,000 people living within 500m of the rail corridor and 23,000 students attending 16 schools. Despite NSW Health noting and reporting that the contribution of coal dust from coal trains beyond 20m from the rail corridor needs to be carefully considered, this recommendation is ignored in the RT/PPR and is simply unacceptable to IVCG.

The additional return train movements and return ship movements necessary to deliver 70Mt of coal to and from T4 will significantly increase diesel emissions in Newcastle and the Hunter. Diesel emissions are listed as a known carcinogen by the International Agency for Research on Cancer. NSW Health's submission to the EA noted the failure of the EA to address diesel exhaust emissions and recommended a comprehensive health assessment. The RT/PPR ignores this recommendation and is simply unacceptable to IVCG.

Even as late as this last Monday there was a report in the Newcastle Herald newspaper whereby seven (7) respected public health professionals (doctors and scientists) all associated with the University of Newcastle are calling on the State government to reject T4 due to serious health issues associated with particulate pollution, a serious side effect of the approval of T4. They report that particle pollution levels in Newcastle are already exceeding standards set by the World Health Organisation, without the impacts of what T4 will bring to.

Port Waratah Coal Services Chief Executive Mr Hennie du Plooy is on record stating the T4 project as planned "meets all the criteria set by the approval authority, including the potential impact on air quality and health". A large part of the submission is devoted to dust generated by coal trains in and out of T4 and Mr du Plooy has also publically stated these were outside the scope of the T4 approval and "typically" dealt with in coalmine or rail project approvals.

Whilst Mr du Plooy is technically correct, IVCG notes that assessing all projects in isolation of each other is what has led to the alarming air quality results now being experienced in the upper and lower Hunter. Major projects such as T4 **should** be considered for their cumulative impacts with all other major developments, such as new coal mines.

6. **Socio economic impacts:** T4 will generate some economic advantage but will also have significant impacts on existing Newcastle and Hunter businesses and communities. These impacts are not adequately offset by the proposed economic benefits of T4.

There is no justification for the project as Port Waratah Coal Services (**PWCS**) does not commit to building T4 but only suggesting an indicative build date of 2015 with operation maybe in 2017. During 2012, only 141Mt of coal was exported meaning 60Mt or 42 per cent of current capacity was not used. Given the major downturn in global coal demand, Newcastle's approved coal export port capacity of 211Mt seems optimistic.

The 120 Mt facilities proposed identified no additional employment would result from its operation yet the revised T4 project at 70Mt million of the RT/PPR is identified as employing 80 additional people. How is this possible? This variation must be explained!

Many notable international sources suggest global coal demand will peak in 2025 and decline thereafter. If this bleak prediction is correct then the Port of Newcastle must diversify and should start that process now. Building a coal terminal for export product that may not come is a ridiculous gamble and certainly not a very sound economic decision. Therefore new industries will be required to replace coal in the near future and these industries will require export facilities that may include use of the T4 site.

Any over reliance of the Port on coal exports may give rise to unique diversification risks later. [2] Whilst it is acknowledged that the value of Newcastle Port Corporation will increase substantially after approval of T4, approving a major development simply to artificially inflate the value of an asset cannot be justified when it restricts future discretion on available limited port land and the opportunities this land may present to alternative proposals.

In conclusion, Islington Village Community Group strongly opposes the proposed approval and construction of the fourth coal loader terminal facilities at Kooragang in the Port of Newcastle. We implore the NSW government and Planning Minister to reject this proposal and explore efficiencies and improvements within the current coal terminal export facilities to increase capacity options without the need for expansion of the current footprint of the coal export industry and the destruction of valuable heritage wetland and conservation sites.

Thank you,



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Check us out at either our website:

<http://islingtonvillage.wordpress.com/>

or on facebook:

<http://www.facebook.com/IslingtonVillage>

[1] Hunter Estuary Wetlands (21/02/84). New South Wales, 2,969 ha

[2] Privatisation of Port Newcastle, Australia. Dr Martyn Taylor, Nigel Deed, 2013.