

Submission prepared by:

***The Black Hill Environment Protection Group and
The Buttai Community Development Group***

Contact Address: 240 Browns Road, Black Hill, NSW, 2322.
Phone: (02) 4930-3172, E-mail: BlackHillEPG@bigpond.com

“Port Waratah Coal Services Terminal 4” (MP10_0125, Preferred Project Report - PPR)

Community Groups’ Submission

Note: Preparation of this submission was co-ordinated by the Executive members of the Community Groups: Colin East, Janet Murray and Terry Lewin.

(Submission date: 21st November, 2013)

The Black Hill and Buttai Community Groups have supported progressive developments and spoken out about socially and environmentally destructive proposals for more than thirty years. Our community knows about the negative impacts of coal mining. We have in our area two open cut coal mines, Bloomfield and Donaldson, creating significant dust and noise impacts on the surrounding community. The Abel underground mine is already creating subsidence issues for our properties, with fears of a repeat of the Glencore or Tasman subsidence debacles.

We object to the proposed Port Waratah Coal Services Terminal 4 Project (T4) (MP10_0125) as described in the Preferred Project Report (PPR) and some of our reasons follow:

1. Understanding the broader 30+ year ramifications of this proposal is essential and this long term analysis is sadly lacking. Additionally, in the medium term, when coal mining is in decline, what will the Hunter Valley and Newcastle's economy look like? This has not even been attempted in the Port Waratah Coal Services PPR. We are also concerned that the Planning Assessment Commission (PAC) and the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure will only evaluate this proposal using short-term measures. The proponent is only focusing on gaining T4 approval and profit, and the government is focused on coal royalties.

Some broader impacts that are omitted or inadequately addressed in the proposal include:

- a) Doubling the volume of coal exported through Newcastle from current levels will inevitably double the size of mining operations in the Hunter Valley and beyond. While ever the port is a bottleneck, surely it gives the Government some ability to exercise control over coal mine applications and only allow the least environmentally and socially damaging? This limitation would then reign in some of the more outrageous proposals from coal companies. Some constraint on government approval of a raft of new coal mines is exactly what is needed for the social, environmental and economic well-being of the Hunter.

- b) This proposal for large-scale infrastructure locks us into long-term coal mining, while multi-national companies recoup their investments. Meanwhile, smart countries elsewhere are working on overcoming the barriers to renewable energy and setting up 21st century carbon neutral industries, while we remain locked into this 19th century greenhouse gas emitting industry. In the long term, this will damage our economy, as well as the planet. As demand for coal dries up, we are left with nothing in its place – no jobs, no alternative energy, and no sustainable new industries. But we will have the contempt of every low-lying nation around the world for our selfishness and stupidity.
- c) This port land could be used for new environmentally friendly industry that would otherwise be precluded if this proposal is given approval. The need for diversity of industry and jobs is critical to the economic wellbeing of the Hunter. Newcastle Port land and exports are currently more than 95% coal. This proposal to give an additional large port area over to coal is unbalanced and dangerous for the long-term economic health of Newcastle and the Hunter. Just as the coal industry has sucked up available port land, it sucks up the vast majority of technically qualified people in the Hunter. Doubling the size of it can only serve to further stifle innovation and alternative industries for a very long time to come.
- d) Doubling the size of the industry will also push mining further out into the Liverpool Plains area and beyond. A proper assessment would identify that destroying rich farm land is not in the long term interests of anyone – not the Hunter, not NSW, not Australia, and not our neighbours who import food from us.
- e) The approval of a 4th coal loader would lead to more open cut coal mines to feed it. This in turn would mean more huge, and ever widening holes in the ground, and ever-growing overburden dumps. Not only is this environmentally destructive to good farming land as it drives people out of their homes and towns, but the consequential exposure of massive areas of bare earth to the prevailing winds sends dirt and dust all the way down the valley from Muswellbrook to the coast.
- f) Newcastle was once considered a dirty, dusty steel town. Since the closure of the steelworks, it has become a more diversified economy with a vibrant arts hub, and who knows where this may lead? With the doubling of coal exports, Newcastle just goes back to being a dirty, dusty coal town, best avoided on the trip north and by passing tourists and cruise liners. What is the cost of this to the broader Newcastle community who aren't engaged in the coal industry?

2. Long-term environmental effects also include destruction of some Ramsar listed Hunter estuary wetlands. This area has been recognised by a world panel as internationally critical habitat for migratory birds. This proposal's attempt to "offset" this land is to be deplored and rejected. Migratory birds go back to the SAME place every year – they don't understand the concept of an offset! Destruction of this particular habitat would mean the end of these migratory birds and a shameful loss. If their habitat was so easily replaced, it wouldn't have been given the Ramsar listing and recognised as "internationally critical habitat".

3. Small particle (<2.5um and <10um) lung damage from coal dust will be exacerbated by the approval for additional coal stockpiles at the port, with a doubling of the existing exposed surface area. These are long-term health effects that will have social impacts and costs way into the future. Only now are some lung disease issues from the Steelworks era coming to light, 14 years after its closure.

4. This proposal is defective as it does not address the cumulative impacts of noise and dust in relation to the three existing coal terminals when they operate at full capacity – currently they are only operating at less than 70% capacity (i.e., 140 mt/y out of 200 mt/y).

If this proposal is approved then the total port output would be double the current output, with 140 mt/y going to 280mt/y. This would double the noise and dust pollution to even more unacceptable levels. The same is true all along the rail corridor, with noise and dust already impacting adversely on people who live close to the line. We have a Planning conflict – Governments want us to live close to the train line and commute to work, but we are kept up all night by coal trains!

Finally, it's the NSW Government's job to understand broader and longer term issues and plan for the best outcome for the State, including the Hunter. The coal companies aren't doing this – they are simply maximising shareholder wealth at our expense. The community expects the Government to show leadership for long term well-being, taking into account the triple bottom line of economic, social and environmental considerations.

The Government should terminate the Terminal review immediately and stop wasting taxpayer money and the community's time and energy. T4 is unnecessary and unjustifiable.

Approving this project would be preventing diversification in our port and industries, while handing money to overseas shareholders at the expense of Newcastle, the Hunter and beyond.