

20 November 2013

NSW Department of Planning

Submission Against the Revised Port Waratah Coal Services Terminal 4 (PPR)

Climate Action Newcastle (CAN) is a committed group of local residents from all backgrounds working together to address the single biggest issue facing humanity: climate change. We are a community based non-party-political group of volunteers who dedicate our time to advocating renewable energy solutions for the Hunter and beyond, as well as opposing policy and developments that lock in dangerous climate change, such as new coal mining and exporting projects. CAN has more than 60 active members as well as more than 900 supporters who receive regular email updates about ongoing campaigns and projects.

On Sunday 17 November more than 500 people turned out in the heavy rain to support the National Day of Climate Action at the Newcastle foreshore, an event organised and promoted by CAN.

There are many environmental, social and also economic reasons why the revised PWCS Terminal 4 (T4) project should not go ahead; and also many areas where the Preferred Project Report has been inadequate or fails to address key issues about the development and its far-reaching impacts. This report focuses on climate change and local coal mining, which are addressed under separate subheadings below.

Greenhouse Gases and Climate Change

The energy usage and greenhouses gases that will result from the Preferred Project with reduced tonnage to 70 MT/annum is still highly significant in terms of global climate change.

The PPR claims that Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions are 'insignificant' by global standards. Atmospheric carbon levels are now higher than they have been for three million years, mainly as a result of human activities, including burning fossil fuels such as coal. With the global carbon budget effectively overbalanced, humanity needs to start actively reducing the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and avoid adding more. The business-as-usual rationale on which such developments as T4 are based, represents old-world thinking which sooner or later must come to an end. In the struggle to keep our climate in a liveable condition, every single tonne of CO₂ (and other greenhouse gases) is significant and should be worthwhile. Generating emissions simply to turn a profit, as is the case here, will soon lose its social licence to operate. Ecologically Sustainable Development has been a catch-

cry since 1992; one day soon businesses and governments must begin putting it into practice.

However, it is the Scope 3 emissions from burning the coal overseas that will make a staggering contribution to global carbon emissions, at 174.2 MT CO₂ equivalent. This represents 30% of Australia's entire domestic emissions; and is greater than the emissions from all sources in NSW. If these emissions were from just one country, that country would rank 30th in the world. The other 160-plus countries emit less than that. From this perspective, the Scope 3 emissions are reason alone to for responsible governments to reject this proposal (and any other coal exporting port proposal in Australia). The inevitable and tired argument that 'if we don't export it, someone else will' is immature and fails to recognise the real and meaningful efforts of these countries to move towards renewable electricity sources.

The demand for 70 mega tonnes of coal to be exported annually from T4 at peak capacity would fuel at least 6 more large power stations around the world, emitting 174.2 MT CO₂ equivalent each year. For PWCS to claim that these 'Scope 3' emissions from burning the exported coal "is beyond the control of PWCS" demonstrates a major failing of NSW and Australian legislation.

The bottom line is that coal dug up from NSW lands is being exported to be burnt in power stations and metallurgical industries overseas; the more that we export, the more that will be burnt and significantly contribute to accelerating global climate change. Conversely, if we do not expand our coal export capacity, the annual tonnage of carbon dioxide resulting from the burning of NSW coal will peak and decline as export customers move to cleaner alternatives. The desperation of the coal industry to increase coal exports for the short time that coal will still be profitable demonstrates a profoundly short-sighted, extreme greed which completely disregards the principles of sustainable development and risks the tenure of future generations.

In June, Australia's Climate Commission [released a report](#) that issues a challenge to Australia's political and business leaders, confirming that "most fossil fuels must be left in the ground and cannot be burned" if we want to meet the agreed goal of limiting global warming to below 2 degrees. The report, titled 'The Critical Decade,' found that:

- The burning of fossil fuels represents the most significant contributor to climate change.
- "From today until 2050 we can emit no more than 600 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide to have a good chance of staying within the 2°C limit."
- Based on estimates by the International Energy Agency, emissions from using all the world's fossil fuel reserves would be around five times this budget. Burning all fossil fuel reserves would lead to

unprecedented changes in climate so severe that they will challenge the existence of our society as we know it today.

In their own Environmental Assessment and PPR, PWCS compare the Scope 3 emissions to total global emissions in 2020 based on a plan to keep warming below 2°C. This misleading tactic results in a low-sounding number at 0.35% of global annual emissions; although we argue that for one discrete development in the context of every other emissions-generating activity in the world, this is considerable. However, in terms of emissions growth, this project alone will add 17.4% of allowable new global emissions in 2020, required to keep warming under 2°C. These numbers are included in the PPR. To put it another way, Of the 1000 MT increase in global greenhouse gas emissions that is allowable to give the world a chance to limit warming to 2 degrees as recommended by scientists, this one project alone will contribute 17.4% of that total. This is from a country with just 0.3% of the global population. This is a relatively huge proportion of the carbon budget, and it is clearly not equitable. For this reason alone the proposal should be rejected.

It is true that these emissions are not covered by state or federal regulations, but by the end-user country's regulations. However, increasing the rate of coal exports has the effect of decreasing global coal prices, thus increasing the overall volume and rate of coal burned on a global basis - meaning more emissions are released sooner. It also very important to note that the resulting effects of climate change do not respect the same jurisdictions. People who are living in marginal environments - particularly arid and coastal areas - will face the brunt of the problems, with increasing drought, desertification and bushfires on the one hand, and salt water inundation and storm surges on the other. Unprecedented floods and landslips already effect even more regions, including here in Australia.

The CSIRO released the ['State of the Climate 2012' report](#) recently and it paints a very sobering picture of human-induced climate change, which is accelerating due to the burning of fossil fuels such as coal. In looking at future temperature increases, the report found that:

"Australian average temperatures are projected to rise by 0.6°C to 1.5°C by 2030 when compared with the climate of 1980 to 1999. The warming is projected to be in the range of 1.0 to 5.0 °C by 2070 if global greenhouse gas emissions are within the range of projected future emission scenarios considered by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change."

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has clearly stated that global temperature increases need to be kept to less than 2°C to prevent runaway climate change with the escalating impacts of positive feedback loops such as loss of reflective sea ice and melting of permafrost. Exporting colossal amounts of coal as is proposed for T4 perpetuates the old-world business-as-usual paradigm which will lock in dangerous, potentially catastrophic climate change. No amount of money is worth the serious risks posed by a rapidly changing climate, and the governments of today who seek

We all know that we are already releasing greenhouse gases into the atmosphere at a rate that will far exceed the capacity of the atmosphere and oceans to absorb it without warming. Scientists say it is “unequivocal” that humans are causing the warming of our atmosphere by burning fossil fuels.

[illegible]

It was a very hot and dry start to October, with maximum temperatures running three to four degrees above average with little rainfall, sending the Fire Danger Ratings soaring and resulting in fires destroying property just north and northeast of the proposed coal loader site and further south in Whitebridge and surrounds. While we cannot say that these events were directly caused by climate change, it is very clear from the science that these anomalies will become more frequent and severe, in Australia and overseas.

We are very confident that PWCS is well aware of this fact, but chooses to downplay the effects of the Scope 3 emissions and continue to push the myth that this fourth coal loader is needed by the Hunter economy.

Every tonne of coal that is shipped from this port is contributing to the global climate crisis, and T4 will increase our rate of contribution. As stated previously, the revised T4 plan has an export capacity of 70MT/annum, equalling 174.2 MT CO₂ equivalent when shipped and burned to produce electricity or steel in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, or China.

The need to mitigate climate change, by emitting less greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, is recognised at the highest levels of government, businesses and institutions of learning worldwide. The World Bank - hardly a left-leaning think-tank or green group - states on its website: "Climate change is a fundamental threat to sustainable development and the fight against poverty. The World Bank is concerned that without bold action now, the warming planet threatens to put prosperity out of reach of millions and roll back decades of development."

The World Bank released a sobering and far reaching report in June this year and at the time World Bank CEO Jim Yong Kim warned 'the time is very, very short; without immediate action the global temperature could rise by four degrees within around 50 or 60 years'. Internationally, big business is starting to baulk at the Carbon Bubble and companies are walking away from assets - such as T4 and other coal loaders - that are likely to be stranded in the long term.

As evidenced by the above, it is people and institution on the right side of science, those looking at this situation with a broader scope, those who consider the externalities in the EA and PPR and their effects on our atmosphere and decide that this plan is unacceptable; it is they who are being sensible.

Knowing what we know about the climate, the decision to expand a fossil fuel based industry is the extreme option. It is a plan that blatantly states that the short term gain of multinational fossil fuel industries is more important than the long term sustainability of our ecosystem and therefore our entire economy. Again, this is the extreme option. The fossil fuel industry's business plan is based on trashing our atmosphere. Those who support this option must own it as a short-sighted deal for the temporary benefit of a few rich people, and either abandon this plan, or accept that they will be judged harshly the community and by history.

Rapid Increase of Coal Mining in NSW

The revised T4 project has a proposed export capacity of 70 megatonnes per annum; this will facilitate the development of at least 6 new 'super-pit' mines in NSW, principally in agricultural and forested lands of the Hunter Valley and

Liverpool Plains, whose communities are already feeling the negative health and environmental impacts of excess levels of open-cut coal mining. The extent of irreparable destruction wrought by open-cut coal mining is already becoming too much for human and ecological communities in the Upper Hunter; another 70 million tonnes worth of new mining activity is almost inconceivable and any government that could countenance this is grossly irresponsible and thinking only of very short-term and short-lived economic gains at the expense of future generations and other species.

The devastating environmental impacts of open-cut mining has been well documented in recent years; and despite the mining industries' claims of 'best practice' remediation and rehabilitation of mine sites, the depth of extraction, total removal of living flora and fauna years of stockpiling soils means that no site can ever be the same again. Coal mining uses vast quantities of water for coal processing, dust suppression and equipment wash-down, sourced from local river systems such as the Hunter River in the Hunter Valley. Furthermore, open-cut mining substantially disrupts and contaminates regional groundwater systems, which are relied upon for ecosystem health as well as indirect and direct agricultural supply.

Conclusions

As other submissions to the PPR will explain, there are many diverse reasons why T4 should not go ahead. Rapidly accelerating climate change and increased coal mining in NSW are two of them, which we have focused on as a climate science and renewable energy advocacy group. Climate change is too serious and far-reaching a problem to ignore. Business-as-usual developments that exploit fossil fuels are antiquated and dangerous, and the decision-makers who pursue them - governments and businesses alike - are morally reprehensible and will be judged accordingly in the years to come. It is time for Australia, NSW, the Hunter Valley and Newcastle to begin weaning itself from coal. Yes, coal has been a major driver of our economic development in the past; but circumstances change, and none are more critical than the rapid and alarming changes that are already being observed and recorded in the global climate, and correspondingly in the surface of the earth - physically and ecologically. Humans are a part of the biophysical world and millions are already suffering the cruel impacts of a changing climate. Much worse is to come, if developments such as T4 continue to be approved. We hope the NSW Department of Planning will come to its senses and reject this proposal.

References:

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