

Vickery Coalmine Extension Submission

Objection

As a climate change refugee, I have recently moved from Narrabri, home for all my married life and for 70 years of my husband's life, to the South Coast of New South Wales. Narrabri is known for its hot summers. However, when the Narrabri temperature record was not just broken, but smashed by 3.6⁰C in January 2014, I knew that it was time to move out.

Earlier, my husband had discussed the CSIRO's climate change predictions for 2070 with a local University of Sydney Institute of Agriculture scientist who is breeding wheat varieties intended to cope better with predicted conditions. Like us, he was interested to know what location in Australia has temperatures, currently, similar to those predicted for the highly productive Narrabri district in 2070. His answer: Oodnadatta. Developing a wheat variety, or any crop, suited to the Oodnadatta climate is an impossibility.

How anyone in government who has read the latest IPCC report can approve another coal mine is incomprehensible. With recent polling showing more than 60% of the Australian population wanting more action on climate change and 84% in favour of renewable energy, the IPCC report simply confirms what the Australian people know - the need to cut carbon pollution as much as possible, as fast as possible.

In a recent door-knock survey of Narrabri, 97% of people answered "yes" when asked if they support renewable energy as a way to provide long-term jobs for Narrabri. They have been underwhelmed by the benefits mining was supposed to have brought to Narrabri but which have not eventuated.

The IPCC report finds that "Climate-related risks to health, livelihoods, food security, water supply, human security, and economic growth are projected to increase with global warming of 1.5°C and increase further with 2°C."

Already the scientific predictions of 20 to 30 years ago are upon us, with temperature records now being broken relentlessly around the world, with longer and more intense heat waves, and with accompanying extreme droughts, floods, and the melting of glaciers and polar ice caps. I have personally visited the Antarctic and witnessed firsthand the melting of these glaciers and sea ice and it is a sobering sight – and it will continue to get worse.

Tragically, we are currently witnessing the slow (and not so slow) death of the Great Barrier Reef. Coral reefs support about 25% of all known marine species. At 1.5°C, the IPCC estimates that about 80% of coral reefs will be lost. At 2°C, virtually all coral reefs will be gone.

To stay below 1.5°C, the IPCC concludes that the world must embark on a World War II-level effort to transition away from fossil fuels, and also start removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere at large scales. We must not add to it.

Too often the argument is put forward that Australia's contribution to global CO₂ emissions is negligible, hence we should do nothing. Taking this argument, we wouldn't have been a world leader in women's suffrage, we wouldn't have participated in either of the World Wars, and we wouldn't take a role in the United Nations. In the ranks of the world's CO₂ emitters, Australia is not far behind Indonesia, Brazil and Mexico, and ahead of the major economies of the United Kingdom, Italy and France. Only the United Arab Emirates have higher emissions per capita. We have an obligation to the world and to ourselves for action – and this means no more coal mines.

Whitehaven take the same attitude into the EIS, claiming that, as they only export the coal and don't burn it in Australia, they are not adding to Australia's greenhouse emissions and hence these emissions do not have to be considered further (page 4-72).

To date, coal companies have chosen to ignore their product's impact on global warming, as Whitehaven has done in this EIS. That time is drawing to a close, with courts around the world now admitting this impact for consideration. This was also the case at Gloucester, NSW, where expert evidence was admitted to the Land and Environment Court, supporting the case that the Rocky Hill Coal Project must be rejected to ensure the global Paris climate target to keep temperature rise to less than two degrees Celsius is met. Climate change researcher Professor Will Steffen argued that if climate change science is accepted, then the mine proposal must be refused to help reduce emissions and stay within the global carbon budget. This is very much the case with the Vickery Extension.

The most recent IPCC report concludes that a world with 2°C of global warming will lead to more heat-related deaths, smaller crop yields, worse extreme weather events, slower economic growth, more people in poverty, and increase the population facing water stress by up to 50% compared to a 1.5°C world. And the impacts will get progressively worse if temperatures warm beyond the 2°C limit.

So why are we even considering extending another coal mine? We have alternative, renewable energy. We have alternative employment opportunities, in renewables and elsewhere. And we have more people (60,000) at risk of losing employment on the Great Barrier Reef than are employed on all the coal mines in Australia.

My husband and I, and our friends, fear most for our grandchildren, as it is they who shall inherit the uninhabitable.