

Angus Place Extension Proposal Submission.

I have written this submission as an interested member of the public with an historical commitment to the Blue Mountains and Lithgow regions.

There are many people who live in the Blue Mountains region that commute to various places of employment in the coal industry and the power generation industry or related workplaces.

I worked at three different coal mines in the Lithgow region during the late 1970's to the 1980's and am familiar with underground coal mining operations where I also experienced long wall mining for a period before leaving the industry.

I still have many friends and community connections within the region.

I served as an Alderman/Councillor from 1983 until 2008 on the Blue Mountains City Council that included ten years as Mayor and six years as Deputy Mayor. I am still the longest serving Mayor of the City of Blue Mountains, and a Freeman of the City of Blue Mountains.

During the 1980's I represented the combined Cities of Blue Mountains and Lithgow and the Shire of Rylstone on the board of the then, Prospect County Council, that was then the sole electricity power distributor to the region.

Submission.

I am not in favour of the proposed Angus Place Extension for many reasons as I believe that the proposal would have a devastating effect on the already delicate environment in the area that is proposed. Careful consideration should be given on where any extensions may be considered.

I refer to the submissions of the Colong Foundation for Wilderness and the Blue Mountains Conversation Society that have adequately covered these environmental issues.

I believe that the Angus Place proposal is giving false hope to our local communities as it has a timeline that allows long wall coal mining in the area to last until 2053 and beyond, and a presumed expectation that the Mount Piper Power Station will still be operational for this entire period.

This is the expectation and impression that Centennial Coal is peddling in the local community by their public relations influences and media messages.

Mount Piper is now over thirty years old and not far away from the industry standard of a 40 to an absolute 50-year maximum life span for coal fired power stations. It must now also be at least in a cycle of a need of a major upgrade.

The chance of there still being a need for this type of power generation for another thirty years or more as the Centennial proposal attempts to suggest, is simply ridiculous.

While I do not want to see jobs lost in either the coal and power industries the reality is that a transition period away from coal powered generation will happen at some time in the future and certainly well before 2053.

I accept the fact that there will still be a need for coal mining in the region for some time yet and that Mount Piper will continue to generate power until another source of power generation replaces it.

All indications of my research suggest that coal fired power generation will continue until after 2030 and in some cases around the country possibly some years longer.

Some of the information and examples I am using in this submission comes from a speech by Tony Maher, the National President of the Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining, and Energy Union, (CFMMEU) to the Sydney Institute on the 27th November 2019. Mr. Maher is also the National Secretary of the Mining and Energy division of the union.

Some various relevant points made by Tony Maher in his speech are,

“As leader of the union representing Australian coal miners and power workers, the climate challenge has been on my radar for a very long time. There is much at stake for members, their families and communities in getting climate policy right.”

“The export coal sector and the domestic coal power industry are two very different beasts, that need to be understood and treated differently.”

“The domestic electricity supply industry accounts for about a third of Australia’s total greenhouse gas emissions. Virtually every owner and operator of coal power is today saying they will ultimately close and not replace their coal power plants.”

“Coal power plants have been closing for almost a decade now and they will be progressively retired and not replaced over the next couple of decades. The main debate about them is how soon they will close. Will they live out their 50- year life spans or be forced out earlier by the amount of renewables coming online.” (1)

Tony Maher also refers to Australia’s obligations under the Paris Climate Agreement to lower greenhouse gas emissions, signed in December 2015.

Other examples to look at are various places around the world such as Europe to know that expectations should not be raised that coal mining and coal power generation will continue forever. Many European countries have completely closed their coal generation plants and moved completely to renewables.

Transition

The Lithgow City Council a few years ago made a good decision, in my view, to affiliate with the Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (WSROC). This will allow their community to have access to the many benefits this can bring to the region.

This region of what is termed, Western Sydney, has more people living in it than the populations of Western Australia and Tasmania combined. It has always been described over many years by the Greater Western Sydney Economic Development Board as the “potential economic powerhouse” of the Pacific Rim.

Lithgow region now has a voice and recognition in the various forums that will hopefully start to generate ideas and assistance for future economic prosperity.

The Blue Mountains, Lithgow and Oberon Tourism Region Authority that was unfortunately dissolved several years ago for all the wrong reasons, should be reinstated for the benefit of this region. Re-forming this organisation would be good starting point for one at least one source of economic development.

I also know that Lithgow City Council has developed or in the process of developing an economic plan for the region and they should receive much credit for this initiative.

Conclusion

“A good example of transition is what AGL have done with their Liddell power station in the Hunter region. They have given their workforce seven years notice of closure and have promised no forced redundancies. The current workforce will be retired, offered voluntary redundancies, redeployed to the nearby Bayswater power station, or redeployed to new activities on the same site.” (1)

Centennial Coal in my view must take some community responsibility and must not mislead or give false hope to the public of our community.

There is a case for Centennial Coal to be given some lease extensions in areas that will not damage the Gardens of Stone for future generations.

Some continued coal extraction for the operation of Mount Piper Power Station for a limited time, but not anywhere near the amount of time they are seeking and certainly not to 2053 or beyond.

Jim Angel

26th April 2020

(1) Speech by Tony Maher, National President CFMMEU to the Sydney Institute 27 November 2019.