

Submission – Hunter Power Project (Kurri Kurri Power Station)

Dear sir/madam,

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to offer my submission for the proposed Hunter Power Project (Kurri Kurri Power Station).

I'm writing to oppose the project as a concerned citizen of NSW. I do not believe a new gas power station is in the best interests of local residents in the Hunter Valley as well as those living further afield.

My reasons for this are threefold. First, the creation of a new gas power plant would be contrary to what we need to be doing to combat climate change and preventing excessive temperature increases in the future. Second, the plant does not make economic sense as it is expensive and there are other, better options available to improve grid reliability. Third, it will impact the health of those living in the Hunter region through decreased air quality and harmful chemicals put out into the atmosphere.

Failing our climate goals

The construction of the Kurri Kurri plant would be contrary to the NSW Government's own Net Zero Plan to reach net zero emissions by 2050. While the plant is said to have reduced emissions levels from the Liddell Power Station, which is soon to be closed, it will still emit 500,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide per year¹ – a significant 0.4 per cent of the state's annual emissions. We can do better and I trust in the government to aim high, take the steps required at this early stage, and transition us to a fully renewable energy economy sooner.

As a member of the Paris Climate Agreement, we are also not on track to meet the modest goals set there. This is another reason why more action needs to be taken instead of half measures like the Kurri Kurri plant which will only partially reduce emissions. Dr Fatih of the International Energy Agency has said² that to meet our targets, "no new oil, gas and coal investments are needed".

The NSW Government also has a legal obligation³ to protect environmental matters of great significance under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. These matters include animals and ecosystems which are under threat from further climate change impacts including the Great Barrier Reef and our own mountain pygmy possums. The construction of this gas plant will not help NSW meet these obligations.

A further duty of care to protect young people from the impacts of climate change has been shown by the recent Federal Court decision⁴ of *Sharma v Minister for the Environment*. While this is still subject to appeal, it shows the government's role to play in taking the right steps to avoid further destruction as our global temperatures increase.

An economic uncertainty

Even just looking at the Kurri Kurri plant from an economic perspective shows that the \$600 million project makes little sense. Kerry Schott, the chair of the Australian Energy Security Board, has criticised the project⁵, saying that the private sector won't build it because it's "expensive power". Even the NSW Energy & Environment Minister, Matt Kean, has publicly said⁶ that gas is "a really expensive way" to create electricity and that you'd be "mad" to use it to drive down prices.

Furthermore, there are other, much better options available including renewable energy and grid storage already available to take advantage of. A number of large batteries have already been promised to come online to help support grid reliability in light of the Liddell plant closure⁷. The NSW Government's own legislation also requires it to underwrite 2,000 MW of storage capacity⁸, so investing in this area instead of Kurri Kurri would be a fantastic start.

Also, the gap in dispatchable capacity which will be left when the Liddell power plant closes has been disputed by a number of expert bodies, who say the closure won't actually affect grid reliability much. Both a government taskforce⁹ and Australian Energy Market Operator¹⁰ have found only an additional 154MW would be needed in NSW by 2023. This gap could be met through a range of other projects already recommended.

Creating poorer health

The third reason why construction of the Kurri Kurri power plant is a poor choice is because of the adverse health impacts it will bring upon residents within the Hunter region. Air quality in the area is already bad due to its history of coal power plants, and the new gas plant will not help make things better.

This is because the plant will be run under pollution standards for "electricity generation" in NSW's Protection of the Environment Operations (Clean Air) Regulation 2010¹¹ which are much more lenient (and therefore more harmful) than the Australian Government's own National Environment Protection (Ambient Air Quality) Measure¹².

According to Snowy Hydro's Environmental Impact Statement¹³, the Kurri Kurri plant will emit a host of harmful chemicals including nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide, particulate matter, and sulphur oxides. These chemicals have been shown to aggravate asthma, increase the chance of heart failure, and raise the risk of respiratory diseases¹⁴. The people most at risk of suffering these harmful medical conditions will be children, the elderly, and those with existing heart and lung problems¹⁵.

Conclusion

For these reasons, the construction of the Kurri Kurri gas power plant will be a poor investment which will not only further decrease our chances of tackling climate change but will also adversely impact the health of those living in the Hunter Valley.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. I hope you will take all of this information on board and decide to decline approval of the project. There are better solutions out there and I hope the NSW Government does what is right and proper in this situation.

Miklos Bolza

References

¹ [Hunter Power Project Environmental Impact](#), April 2021

² [Top energy chief tells Australia to get to net zero emissions before 2050](#), Sydney Morning Herald, May 2021

³ [About the EPBC Act](#), Australian Government website

⁴ [Sharma v Minister for the Environment](#), Federal Court, May 2021

⁵ [Australian energy board chair says gas-fired power plant in Hunter Valley 'doesn't stack up'](#), The Guardian, April 2021

⁶ [Government accused of pressuring experts who questioned its gas-fired recovery plan](#), ABC, April 2021

⁷ [Shell and Edify in landmark big battery storage deal in NSW](#), Renew Economy, May 2021

⁸ [NSW orchestrates 12 GW of renewables and 2 GW of pumped hydro by 2030](#), PV Magazine, November 2020

⁹ [Advice to government contradicts Coalition claim over Liddell coal plant closure](#), The Guardian, September 2020

¹⁰ [2020 Electricity Statement of Opportunities](#), Australian Energy Market Operator, August 2020

¹¹ [Protection of the Environment Operations \(Clean Air\) Regulation 2010](#), April 2021

¹² [National Environment Protection \(Ambient Air Quality\) Measure](#), Australian Government, May 2021

¹³ [Hunter Power Project Environmental Impact Statement](#), April 2021

¹⁴ [The assessment of health impacts and external costs of natural gas-fired power plant of Qom](#), October 2016

¹⁵ [Air quality in the Upper Hunter Valley](#), NSW Department of Planning, Industry and the Environment