

POWER IN NUMBERS:

The Case for Sustainable Jobs in the Hunter

Submission of 1,232 people's views on the
Hunter Power Project (Kurri Kurri Power Station)

Coordinated by the
GAS FREE HUNTER ALLIANCE




INTRODUCTION

Between 20 May and 9 June, 2021, 1,232 people in New South Wales filled out a survey detailing why they oppose the \$600m publicly funded Kurri Kurri Power Station, so that their views could be presented to the New South Wales Department of Planning, Industry and Environment. Their views have been captured in a CSV file and are attached as an appendix to this submission.

Survey respondents come from a diverse range of backgrounds. They work in a range of sectors, from mining, to environmental science, to education, to medicine, and more. A high proportion of them, 304 respondents in total, live in the Hunter Valley. In this submission, the views of local people have been emphasised to demonstrate the concerns of those most immediately impacted.

In this same time period, a total of 9,348 people in New South Wales signed a petition to the New South Wales Environment Minister Matt Kean, requesting that the Kurri Kurri Power Station be rejected, including 1,576 people in the Hunter Valley. While not every person who signed the petition went on to take the survey, the survey results give a strong indication of the concerns driving many local people to oppose the proposed plant.



What emerges from the data is a strong local concern about the long-term impact on jobs and the local economy, the long-term impact of increased emissions on the climate, the impact on public health and general concerns around what is perceived as an inadequate level of consultation with local people.



ABOUT THE

Gas Free Hunter Alliance

The Gas Free Hunter Alliance was launched in May 2021 to unite and coordinate numerous Kurri Kurri, Newcastle and the Lower Hunter groups and their increasing opposition to the Hunter Power Project.¹ Gas Free Hunter Alliance represents First Nations people, Kurri Kurri locals and Hunter Residents concerned about climate impacts and people fighting the gas pipeline.



FINDINGS

STATEMENT (Each survey taker was given a series of statements and asked to select those they agreed with)	PERCENT WHO AGREED IN NSW	PERCENT WHO AGREED IN THE HUNTER
The federal government should not be investing in fossil fuels when climate science says we need to break away.	98.4%	96.4%
There has not been enough public consultation on this project.	76.1%	78.6%
The gas plant's cost of \$600 million is a waste of public money.	92.7%	92.7%
The project only creates 10 jobs - this doesn't justify the amount spent on it.	79.2%	80.9%
I am concerned about the public health impacts of gas fired power generation.	70.4%	73.4%

The data in these submissions reveals clear patterns in the concerns of local people, and others across New South Wales. Survey results indicate four major themes among concerns:

1. The lack of long-term economic benefits of this project to the region.
2. The dangerous impact of greenhouse gases produced by the Kurri Kurri Power Station, in the context of climate change.
3. The lack of public consultation on the project.
4. The adverse public health impacts of the Kurri Kurri Power Station.

We will go through each of these four concerns in turn, examining some of the qualitative answers provided by people in the Hunter Valley region, alongside the quantitative data, in order to understand the personal stories behind these numbers.

1. There is concern over the perceived lack of long-term economic benefits to the region.

Many survey respondents were in agreement that public investment in the Hunter Valley is welcome, but quantitative and qualitative answers suggest **strong scepticism about the long-term benefits** of a large public investment in fossil fuels.

"Firstly, I work in the mining sector and am a parent seeking a better future for my children. I am concerned that the plant employs so few local people long-term. I would rather see an environmentally astute peak loading solution developed that employs many more taxpayers and offer the regional footprint a demonstrated way to get off the belief that only fossil based solutions create jobs. This large investment should continue in the region, however not in this format. The idea is completely flawed. Thank you."

SCOTT FERGUSON, POSTCODE 2281

"My family has lived nearby for 50 years. We are nurses, doctors, teachers, tradespeople, students and parents. We all are outraged. At this unjustifiable spending of taxpayers money. At this missed opportunity to foster jobs for locals transitioning out of the coal mines."

PAUL RAMZAN, POSTCODE 2235

The project's cost of \$600 million in public funds was a frequent theme. Respondents questioned the business case for such a large outlay of public funds, given the widely reported lack of interest in the project from private investors.² It has been reported that the business case will not be made publicly available for a "couple of months, leaving many locals to look on the investment with scepticism."³

92.7% of survey respondents agreed with the statement "The gas plant's cost of \$600 million is a waste of public money." This number holds steady for those with a Hunter Valley postcode – 92.7% of locals also agree with this statement.

"The gas plant is likely to be unnecessary at the rate at which renewable and battery technology is improving both in efficiency and costs. I can't see any way that this proposed plant will reduce electricity costs unless you ignore the \$600M of state residents money. If the power companies, banks and other investors won't build such a plant then that should tell you it is a bad investment. A good forward thinking government would be spending this money on renewable energy sources and batteries plus training mining employees in other trades or professions."

MEL LLEWELLYN, POSTCODE 2280.

Many respondents cited economists who have publicly criticised the Kurri Kurri plant. Tony Wood, Director of the Energy Program at the Grattan Institute, said of the project, "It's not necessary for prices, it's not necessary for reliability and it's not necessary to bring down emissions."⁴

Economist Ross Garnaut described the investment as akin to "burying banknotes." He added: "Anything else you do with the money would be more valuable than redundant capacity, we've got huge amounts of surplus gas generation in Australia."⁵

Kerry Schott, the Chair of Australia's Energy Security Board, said of the project: "nobody is going to build it from the private sector because it doesn't stack up. Because it's expensive power, it's hard to see [that] it makes commercial sense."⁶ These expert critiques are reflected in the survey responses, with some respondents concerned about the region being stuck with a costly stranded asset.

"Listen to the IEA, Ross Garnaut, the School Children strikers, the AEMO and simply commonsense. Renewables are the only way we should be now directing finances. Fix the Grid and continue with batteries. Keep going with green hydrogen. There are so many avenues with renewables; a gas fired power station will be a stranded asset."

WARREN DELL, POSTCODE 2260

"I am an economist by trade and can clearly see that this is not economically viable and will not lead to lower gas prices for the community. Spending \$600 million taxpayer money to create 10 long-term jobs is not justifiable."

DR INGRID SCHRANER, POSTCODE 2284

Many respondents cited the relative lack of long-term jobs as a factor in their opposition to the project. It has been widely reported that only 10 long-term jobs will be created by this project⁷.

79.2% agreed with the statement "the project only creates 10 jobs - this doesn't justify the amount spent on it," rising to 80.9% among those with a postcode in the Hunter Valley region.

"It's ludicrous for the federal government to be wasting so much money on a fossil fuel powered dinosaur. All the experts say it's not needed. I live in the Hunter Valley and I know that there are more jobs in transitioning to renewables than in fossil fuel. We should switch to sustainable power generation NOW."

DAVE BROWN, 2325.

"As every expert has pointed out spending \$600 million on a gas fired power generator is plain stupid, a complete waste of money. I would prefer to see that sort of money spent on the CSIRO labs at Waratah and at the University of Newcastle to research efficient generation of exportable hydrogen. That is the way to create jobs and export income for the NSW Hunter Valley."

JIM SMART, 2323.

The recent report by the Victoria Energy Policy Centre states that the proposed Kurri Kurri Power Station (KKPS) is simply not needed.⁸ The Australian Energy Market Operator forecasts no shortfall of dispatchable power generation in NSW. But KKPS would have a limited supply of gas and its back-up diesel will be prohibitively expensive. KKPS, like nearby gas fired power plant, Colongra, would be unlikely to be capable of running (at capacity) on gas for more than about five hours at a time. It would then take a day or so for its gas supply to recharge. This would fall far short of the innovative new technology needed to provide power to NSW homes and businesses.

2. The Kurri Kurri Power Station would produce greenhouse gases, which is unacceptable in the context of a warming climate.

In November 2020, the New South Wales Government announced its *Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap*. State Minister for Energy & Environment Matt Kean said at the time: “NSW has some of the best natural resources in the world and this *Roadmap* is about acting now to leverage our competitive advantage and to position NSW as an energy superpower.”⁹

It comes after the Black Summer bushfires of 2019–20, when Minister Kean criticised Australia’s inaction on climate change.

“If this is not a catalyst for change, then I don’t know what is... this is not normal and doing nothing is not a solution. We need to reduce our carbon emissions immediately, and we need to adapt our practices to deal with this kind of weather becoming the new normal.”

MATT KEAN, DECEMBER 2019.¹⁰

Many respondents’ submissions suggest that the Kurri Kurri Power Plant is a decisive moment for the New South Wales government to make a statement about whether the future is in publicly subsidised fossil fuels or the renewable energy boom promised by Minister Kean’s previous statements.

“It contradicts both NSW’s and the Australian government[’]s obligations to commit to, and reduce, greenhouse gas emissions. It is not ecologically sustainable development. It is not critical state significant infrastructure if it is only to operate at 2% of its proposed built capacity.”

CHRISTOPHER WILMOT, 2289.

Public awareness of the devastating impact of climate change is high, after Australian communities have experienced the devastation of raging fires, droughts and floods in recent years. This year the Executive Director of the International Energy Agency warned governments around the world that investment in fossil fuels needed to be phased out immediately.

“If governments are serious about the climate crisis, there can be no new investments in oil, gas and coal, from now – from this year.”

FATIH BIROL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE IEA.¹¹

Among respondents, 98.4% agreed with the statement “The federal government should not be investing in fossil fuels when climate science says we need to break away,” including 96.4% of those in Hunter.

It is not surprising in this context that many respondents were excited by the prospect of turning the Hunter into a renewable energy hub that prepares the local economy for the global transition away from fossil fuels.

“There is an urgent need for public investment in the Hunter region to drive a transition away from fossil fuels. We DO need publicly owned and operated energy infrastructure. But this project is a crime against the climate. Let’s fight to [give] the money to publicly owned renewable energy instead!”

PADRAIC GIBSON, 2205.

“We need to plan for the future. Gas is a polluting fossil fuel and will harm the environment. Put the money into community batteries which will help to stop the spikes in power caused by the wonderful solar panels on so many roofs across the region. This is a gross waste of public money.”

ANONYMOUS, 2282.

3. There has been inadequate public consultation on the project.

Many respondents argued that the consultation process has felt rushed, and that there is inadequate information to assess the impact on the local community.

On Tuesday 25 May, the CEO of Snowy Hydro told a Senate hearing that it would be a “couple of months” before the business case for Kurri Kurri Power Station was made publicly available.¹² Many respondents were justifiably confused about how they might assess the benefits of the project to the local economy without this crucial information available.

“I’m concerned there hasn’t been a detailed business case and the spending might not be justified. What are the other options (renewables) and what are the overall impacts (including costs and other impacts).”

DANIEL DALEY, 2289.

“I am concerned about the environmental effect and the large amount of money being given when commercial companies can’t see that it can make a profit or have the right infrastructure for the gas plant. I am not sure that the local people want or need a gas plant close to them.”

JENNIFER EDWARDS, 2251.

Many respondents, particularly those who live nearest to the proposed site, expressed outrage at the

short consultation period, and what was characterised as an inadequate level of engagement with local people.

70.4% of respondents, including 73.4% of those who live in the Hunter, agreed with the statement: "there has not been enough public consultation on this project."

"As a resident who lives just 15 minutes from Kurri Kurri, I am appalled that there has not been more public consultation!"

HELEN DIACONO, 2323.

"Absolutely no community consultation. Funding an expensive, outdated, dirty, polluting power source in a residential area."

TERESE MCGRATH, 2327.

"It is time for those in power to consult and listen to the communities impacted by these developments, as well as a consideration of the cost and benefits of the local community, including jobs and health impacts."

LIBBY MANNING, 2300.

Given these concerns, it feels reasonable to request a longer period, and more thorough stakeholder engagement, so that the concerns of local people can be heard and properly addressed.

4. Local people are concerned about the adverse public health impacts of the Kurri Kurri Power Station.

Many respondents raised concerns about the public health consequences of burning gas so close to residential areas. Unsurprisingly, concern was strongest among those who live nearest to the proposed site.

"I live near the site and I'm nervous about health and environment impacts. They will burn diesel before gas which is terrible. No local benefit from this project."

ISABEL DEMPSEY, 2321.

"I live close enough to Kurri that any proposed gas fired power station there will lead to direct exposure to emissions from such. We already have a planned crematorium going in even closer. We are already exposed to dust from Hunter coal mines and emissions from existing coal fired power stations. Enough is enough."

BRIAN HEWITT, 2321.

"I think it is especially worrisome for the area due to the pollution already in the air from coal dust."

KALINDA MATTHEWS, 2320.

Some concerns were raised from those in the medical community as well:

Some concerns were raised from those in the medical community as well:

"I'm a GP and I see the impact of respiratory disease on people's lives as well as the health cost. Not only will the gas plant cost a huge amount of money, it will also damage the health of the surrounding population."

SAMIR HUSSEIN, 2289.

"As a registered nurse and previously Clinical Nurse Consultant in Respiratory with asthma myself, this project goes against all the science we have on climate change. It will be very detrimental to health in the Hunter."

HELEN WEAVERS, 2280.

76.1% of people agreed with the statement "I am concerned about the public health impacts of gas fired power generation", rising to 78.6% of those in the Hunter.

Given these serious concerns around the impact on the health of hundreds of local people, it seems only reasonable that the New South Wales government intervenes until the public can be assured their

SUMMARY

The Kurri Kurri Power Station has been proposed by the Australian federal government at a momentous time for the world. Dire warnings from scientists about climate change are shifting long-held beliefs around the world about how we produce energy. These shifts and decisions will have a long-lasting impact on communities in the Hunter and many others around Australia.

For generations, the Hunter has been a powerhouse of Australia's energy, and no one wants to see that disappear. But with the world turning away from fossil fuels and investment in renewables growing, the writing is on the wall for high-polluting industries.

At a time like this, the very least our leaders owe us is honesty about the realities of a shifting energy market. Local people need to be properly engaged, so that we can develop a sustainable economy for the future with the support of local, state and federal governments.

We welcome the New South Wales' government's stated commitment to investing in renewable energy that will allow regions like the Hunter to keep the lights on around the country for generations to come.

But at key decision moments, that commitment needs to be backed up by action.

And as the survey data shows, there are serious concerns from local people about the economic viability, climate impacts, public health impacts of this project, and the process that has surrounded it.

Therefore we call on the New South Wales government to intervene and stop the construction of this gas plant and engage local people on how to deliver sustainable benefits to the community and long term jobs to the local economy, in line with the government's stated commitments on mitigating the worst effects of climate change.

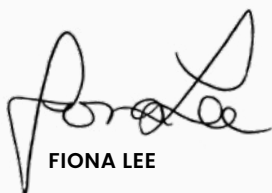
We'll leave you with the words of Brian, a local who filled out our survey.

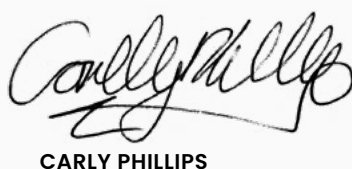
"I oppose the Gas plant because there is no reason for it to be built. The Australian energy regulator has said that a new gas fired power plant is not required and the International Energy Agency has said no new oil, gas or coal developments can be approved if the world is to avoid the worst effects of climate change. If it were viable the private sector would build it. It will not provide significant jobs and the claim that it will force energy prices down is highly contestable and an insult to all Australians that have already suffered the effects of climate change with burnt and/or flooded houses and wildlife destruction. These very real personal and national costs are not being considered and they should be. The argument could also be made that energy cost reductions could be better achieved by the Government adopting policies and targets to move quickly to renewables and provide certainty for private investment.

It is a huge, unwarranted, and unnecessary waste of public funds and has had little public consultation."

BRIAN DOHERTY, POSTCODE 2311.

Signed,


FIONA LEE


CARLY PHILLIPS

Gas Free Hunter Alliance



The Gas Free Hunter Alliance have compiled this submission with assistance from GetUp staff. The petition "Reject Kurri Kurri Gas Plant" was set up by the Gas Free Hunter Alliance on the Campaigns by Me website, which is administered by GetUp.

References

- 1 The [Gas Free Hunter Alliance](#) have compiled this submission with assistance from GetUp staff. The petition “Reject Kurri Kurri Gas Plant” was set up by the Gas Free Hunter Alliance on the Campaigns by Me website, which is administered by GetUp.
- 2 [Federal government will spend \\$600 million on new Kurri Kurri gas plant in the NSW Hunter Valley](#), ABC News, 18 May 2021.
- 3 [Snowy Hydro chief executive tells inquiry he’s known owner of NSW gas plant site for 40 years](#), The Guardian, 26 May 2021.
- 4 [Morrison government to fund \\$600m gas-fired power plant in NSW Hunter region](#), The Guardian, 18 May 2021.
- 5 [‘We’re burying banknotes’: Ross Garnaut rubbishes government’s \\$600m gas plant](#), Sydney Morning Herald, 27 May 2021.
- 6 Australian energy board chair says gas-fired power plant in Hunter Valley ‘doesn’t stack up’, The Guardian, 30 April 2021.
- 7 Morrison government bankrolls \$600m Hunter Valley gas plant, Sydney Morning Herald, 19 May 2021.
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- 9 Energy superpower plan to turbocharge Renewable Energy Zones and pumped hydro, NSW Government, 9 November 2020.
- 10 ‘This is not normal’: Minister urges action on climate change, Sydney Morning Herald, 10 December 2019.
- 11 No new oil, gas or coal development if world is to reach net zero by 2050, says world energy body, The Guardian, 18 May 2021.
- 12 Snowy Hydro chief executive tells inquiry he’s known owner of NSW gas plant site for 40 years, The Guardian, 26 May 2021.