



## Community Environment Network Inc.

*An alliance of community and environment groups*

22<sup>nd</sup> February 2017

### Senate Environmental Committee Retirement of Coal Fired Power Stations – Supplementary Submission: Legacy Issues

Dear Committee,

I wish to add to my previous submission and highlight legacy Issues with the closure of Coal Fired Power Stations.

I previously outlined my power industry experience over a period of approximately 25 years. However, after leaving the industry, I had further relevant experience in a number of roles, including:

- Trustee of the **NSW Environmental Trust** (1998 to 2002) which funded remediation of many contaminated land sites in NSW caused by approximately 50 abandoned Coal Gasworks. These operated from the late 1800s to the 1960s. The heavy tar deposits remaining after producing coal gas are highly carcinogenic.
- Board member **Sydney Catchment Authority** (1999 to 2012) which operated Warragamba Dam and had to manage water contamination from Wallerawang Power Station on the Cox's River and the old mine (silver and lead) site of Yerranderie;
- Board member **Hunter Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority**, (2006 to 2012) which had to prepare catchment plans including those affected by coal mining and power station operations. This includes; Hunter Salinity Trading scheme, open cut mine voids, discharges from longwall mining operations and discharges from ash dams and cooling towers.

In particular, I draw the Committees' attention to some of the legacy issues of closing power stations:

1. **Infrastructure**; such as Ash dams are very large and contain many tens of millions of tons of waste. The dams need to be managed until a use is found for the ash. These large dams cannot be allowed to fail as the product would pour downstream. Ongoing monitoring and maintenance will be required over generations.
2. **Storage Areas**; such as Ash Dams and Fuel Dumps.
  - Ash Dams are major pieces of infrastructure containing many tens of millions of tonnes of boiler and fly ash. Leaching from this material may be trace elements in quantities to be toxic to aquatic life, examples include: Selenium, Sulphur, Uranium and Boron.
  - Fuel Dumps, Coal Stacks and Chemical Storage plants have leaks and spillages over a lifetime of decades. This is likely to contaminate sub-soil and groundwater.
3. **Mine Voids or exhausted or abandoned underground mines**; there are two forms of responsibility:
  - Mine or Power Station ownership where liability is clear, or;
  - Ownership cannot be established these are managed in NSW by the Derelict Mines Committee.

I expect that the liability for the legacy issues associated with privatized power stations and coal mines would already have been transferred to the relevant state governments when the assets were privatized. Governments enjoy sovereign immunity to some extent. However, this enormous cost is probably already locked into the public purse and will be an ongoing liability which may impact on peoples' health.

In comparison, **Renewables** are cheap to build and run and create none of these ongoing issues or liability for taxpayers.

John Asquith,

Chairman of CEN