

**RIX's CREEK SOUTH MINE, DA 49/94 MODIFICATION 10.  
Public Meeting 20 May 2019**

We of DAMSHEG, the Denman Aberdeen Muswellbrook Scone Healthy Environment Group, acknowledge and respect the Wonnaruah people, the traditional custodians of the land we meet on today and note this land was never ceded.

We are objecting to this modification because we know we must leave this carbon sequestered in the ground.

**OBJECTION**

Since our last meeting about the Rix's Creek continuation at least 2 significant international reports have been published. They are the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) "*Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty.*" The second report is the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) "*2019 Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services*"

Both these reports add to our knowledge of climate change and its impacts. The IPCC report provides a huge amount of information to support the prediction that making the fast turn around to keep global average warming to 1.5°C compared to 2°C will be a significant benefit for humanity and the environment.

*"Limiting global warming to 1.5°C would require rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society, the IPCC said. With clear benefits to people and natural ecosystems, limiting global warming to 1.5°C compared to 2°C could go hand in hand with ensuring a more sustainable and equitable society."*

The IPBES headlines that 1 million species are on the verge of extinction due to environmental collapse, identifying the 5 main drivers as: "changes in land and sea use; direct exploitation of organisms; climate change, pollution, and invasion of alien (feral) species."

In the recent more local legal context, the Rocky Hill Decision, February 2019, the Court accepted Professor Will Steffen of ANU's expert opinion in relation to the climate change impacts of the Rocky Hill Coal Mine project. Professor Steffen again wrote an Expert Report few weeks ago for the Moolarben IPC Public Hearing, against the fallacy of the argument that any single polluter is small in the entire context, and also against the OTHER fallacy, of continuing to mine because if we don't others will.

He said that any carbon budget hoping to meet the current temperature target is incompatible with 1) development of new or expanded fossil fuel extraction, and with 2) increases of any size, in fossil fuel production.

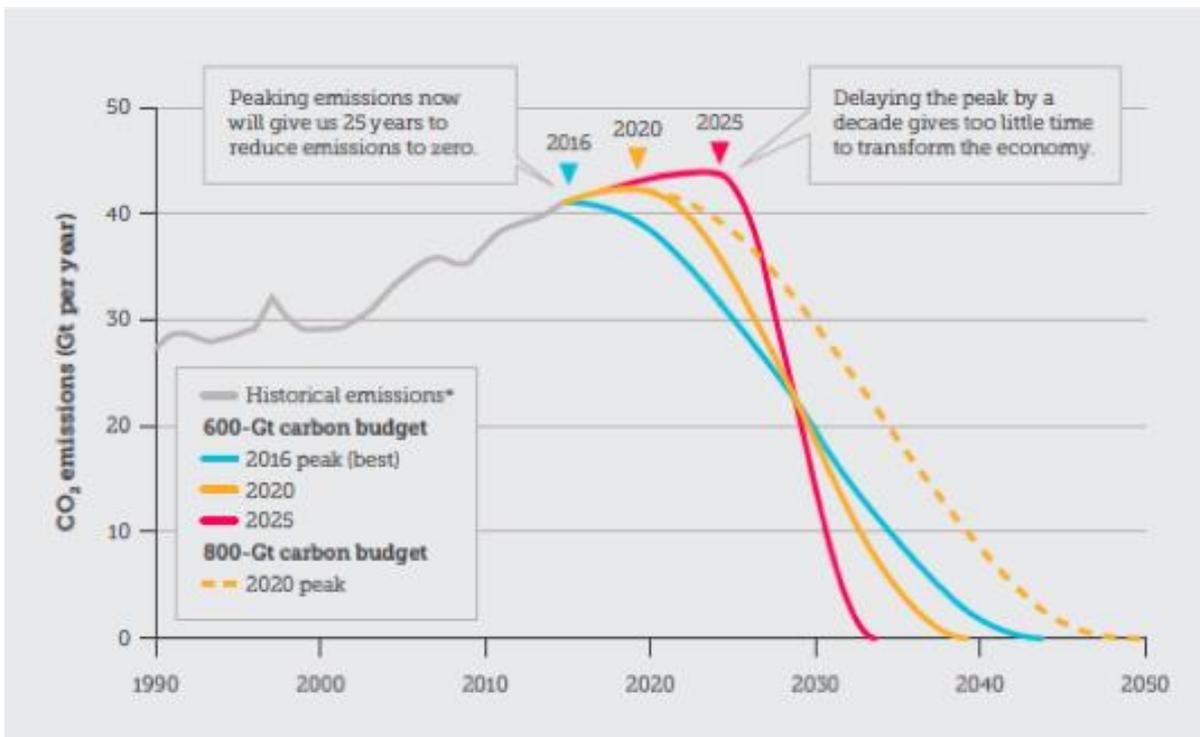
Rix's Creek MOD 10 is an increase of coal production, adding close to THREE MILLION tons of CO<sub>2</sub>, over just NINE MONTHS. Therefore the Rix's Creek modification 10 is inconsistent with **the Carbon Budget approach to Climate stabilisation.**

The Carbon Budget approach places importance on the quantity of fossil fuel CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, not on the purpose for which they are burnt. Australia is the only major fossil fuel producer in the OECD// r, and over 90% of its existing coal reserves cannot be burned if we are to stay within the Paris Accord's 2 degree target, let alone the more stringent 1.5 degree target.

The action required of Australia is then, not just refusing to expand further fossil fuel exploitation, but actually closing mines and gas wells before their economic lifetime is complete.

Steffen's team calculated a carbon budget for 2011 – 2050, suitable for meeting the 2 degree target. They found that 62% of the global fossil fuel reserves in Australia need to be left in the ground, unburned, to fulfil that carbon budget.

The graph drawn by Steffen shows that in order to meet the Paris accord, emissions must be reduced rapidly and deeply, requiring the quick phaseout of EXISTING fossil fuel mines and wells. Delaying the peak of Earth's carbon emissions by one more decade gives too little time to transform the economy. Since as recently as 2016, the carbon budget allowed to us has reduced, Steffen shows, by 30 gigatons. That is seen against the total of 600 Gt we can spend to stop at 1.5 degrees warming, or the 800 Gigatons beyond for 2 degrees.



The Carbon Budget approach shows us the necessary trajectory of emission reductions for reasonable survival. Delaying the peak emissions just five further years would create a reduction trajectory which economically and technologically, the world just cannot achieve.

The recent IPCC Special Report gives us only 15 years to meet the 1.5 degree target. But Steffen says that allowing for *carbon feedbacks*, this must be cut back even further, to eight or nine years at the present rate of emissions.

The Carbon Feedback he refers to, which reduces the Carbon Budget we have left to spend, is made up of phenomena in the natural carbon cycle, for example the melting of permafrost, and the collapse of the Amazon Rainforest back into savannah lands. He considers these natural events would be significant, and like the rising seas from melting ice, completely out of our control. He says that the non-CO<sub>2</sub> gases which also contribute to warming are assumed to be reducing also, but this is more difficult for us to manage; they come from food production. So he says, we need deeper cuts in CO<sub>2</sub> to compensate for that difficulty.

The Carbon Budget Steffen gives us, is calculated from estimated reductions in global greenhouse gas emissions required to meet a temperature target. The estimates emerge from the linear relationship between gases in the atmosphere since 1870, and the global temperature rise over that time. The gap is measured between energy into and out from, the earth, due to varying gas concentrations and the earth's varying reflectivity.

An integrated graph demonstrates these relationships in Steffen's paper.

He names CO<sub>2</sub> as being the most important greenhouse gas, saying that 90% of the human induced emissions of this gas come from burning of fossil fuel, and 10% from landuse

change. Clearly the average surface temperature of the earth has increased with the cumulative amount of CO<sub>2</sub> emitted from all human sources since 1870.

Analysis shows that in only 20 to 21 years, the World economy must reach zero net emissions. Following from that, emissions must be at their peak next year, 2020, at latest.

We are seeing the effects of an overall 1 degree rise in temperature worldwide, already.

The upshot for Australia, is that it is not doing nearly enough to meet its obligations under the Paris accord. Also, most shamefully, if every country followed Australia's level of reduction activity, the trajectory would lead us to a temperature rise of 3 to 4 degrees by 2100, and an extreme damage to our children's biosphere.

**In this context, the idea of yet another extension of Rix's Creek mine, is unconscionable.**

Significantly, Professor Steffen's evidence was not contested by the Minister for Planning in the Rocky Hill Decision.

The court found that found that *"the direct and indirect GHG emissions of the Rocky Hill Coal Project will contribute cumulatively to the global total GHG emissions"*<sup>[1]</sup> and *"all anthropogenic GHG emissions contribute to climate change."*<sup>[2]</sup>

<sup>[1]</sup> *Gloucester Resources Limited v Minister for Planning* [2019] NSWLEC 7, [515].

<sup>[2]</sup> *Ibid* at [514].

Furthermore, the Environmental Defenders Office said the Rocky Hill decision confirmed that climate change must be in the minds of decision makers when assessing the impacts of greenhouse gas emissions on the climate, environment and people, and that decision makers are obligated to make decisions having regard to the need to limit global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. The ruling emphasises that *"the global problem of climate change needs to be addressed by multiple local actions to mitigate emissions by sources and remove GHGs by sinks"*.

[https://www.edonsw.org.au/climate\\_ready\\_laws\\_nsw\\_blog](https://www.edonsw.org.au/climate_ready_laws_nsw_blog)

Commissioners, we in the Upper Hunter have just survived the hottest Summer of our lives and on record last Summer. We, in late May are still in short sleeves and only thinking of winter. Last summer 664,000 cattle died in a rain event in North Queensland. The previous fortnightly rainfall record was 800mL, this event was 1,400mL. This event was the same pattern as the unprecedented floods in Houston, South Carolina and then American mid west. The record intensity cyclones hitting Mozambique and neighbouring countries a month apart and the fact that in 2010 half of Pakistan was flooded are demonstrate how high energy consumption in wealthy countries disproportionately impacts much poorer peoples. You must remember the fires last summer in Tasmania and those but a few years earlier. This small sample of extreme weather events, catastrophic as they are, should be enough to move us to work together to find new ways of sharing this planet and looking after not just exploiting the environment.

Our Healthy Environment Group is based around the towns of this locality, and is concerned for the life and welfare of all our children including those of the miners.

DAMS HEG condemns the application as having no consideration for the future of this region, or our nation, and of life on Earth.

On a personal note, I commented at the Rix's Creek IPC meeting in February when the Cancer Council made its infamous advocacy pitch for the 20 year Rix's Creek Extension, either side of the New England Hwy, that cancer is most frequently an environmental disease. Since that meeting, and in fact with in the last 6 months 2 of my neighbours and myself, half the people living on our mining depopulated road, have been diagnosed with cancer.

Many people are now moving to Muswellbrook as investment housing has been transferred to social housing. The now cheap rents are an indication that Muswellbrook is no longer considered a good place to live. The poor air quality and devastated landscapes are oppressively visible to all of us. This is social engineering at its worst.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak.

Rix's Creek MOD 10 must be refused. "

Wendy Wales

For Denman Aberdeen Muswellbrook Scone Healthy Environment Group

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