



# KEEP LAKE MACQUARIE CLEAN

19 November, 2019

The Chair,  
Mr Peter Duncan,  
Independent Planning Commission, NSW.

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Dear Mr Duncan

The purpose of this submission to the Independent Planning Commission is to express on behalf of the citizens of Lake Macquarie concerns that the government is -

- Failing to do enough to protect Lake Macquarie from pollution from the power stations at Eraring and Vales Point.
- Failing to communicate in a way all citizens can understand the extent of the pollution, the dangers to human and marine life and what the authorities are doing about it.

Lake Macquarie may have the image of a pristine place but is in reality a repository of industrial contamination.

We call for -

- The citizens of Lake Macquarie to receive regular reports on the water and air quality of Lake Macquarie. The reports to be the result of regular testing conducted by a credible, independent and impartial organisation.
- The reports to be communicated to the people of Lake Macquarie in language they can comprehend leaving a clear understanding of the threats, present and future, to their health and the Lake in general and the remedies being undertaken.

The absence of such a clear explanation can only lead to suspicion of either a cover-up or incompetence by the regulator.

Lake Macquarie has a history of industrial abuse (Pasminco). This is acknowledged by Government at all levels and industry alike.

But exactly how damaged is Lake Macquarie now and how much worse is it likely to get?

We are not being told - at least not in a language people can understand.

Most of the responses to our enquiries of Federal, State and Local Government as well as the energy industry are clouded in obscurity. They appear to have been drafted by masters of obfuscation.

We put a series of questions to the EPA. For example

- What compliance audit process does the EPA have in place to ensure that leachate and seepage from coal ash dams and emplacements is not polluting the lake?
- What additional groundwater monitoring stations are required ?

There was no response to the first question. The answer to the second question contained the following –

*“The EPA understands that [the 2009 groundwater management plan] is now encompassed more broadly within other management plans that the licensee has developed in accordance with planning approval to minimise environmental impacts from the site”.*

There were no copies or links to these other plans! There was a statement that four additional groundwater monitoring bores were included in Eraring’s licence in 2016. A link was provided to the licence register, allowing us to find the revised licence but no direct link to the location information for the bores. Reference was made to EPA DOC16/616587 that provides locations of all monitoring points. This document was not provided. Google search found “07.Eraring Monitoring Points Location Map.PDF.

It appears Lake Macquarie residents are expected to be environmental detectives in order to discover whether their health is in jeopardy and what the authorities are doing about it.

It is clear that Federal, State and Local Government and the energy companies concerned want Lake Macquarie residents to believe that the Lake is not a health hazard and that best practice is being employed to mitigate possible dangers.

There is, however, ample evidence to suggest this is open to serious question.

#### Example 1

The approval for the existing Eraring ash dam was given with an undertaking by the operators that 80% of the ash would be reused and not stored in the dam. They have failed to achieve this target. Origin Energy publicly reported in their “Sustainability Report 2018” that they have reused only 29.75% of total ash produced in FY2018.

## Example 2

There have been two recently publicised breaches of the licence relating to pollutants blowing into the air from the existing Eraring power station ash dam.



The first photograph was taken on the 12<sup>th</sup> November, 2019 and publicised by NBN News on the 14<sup>th</sup>. The second was taken by a local resident on the 17<sup>th</sup> October, 2019.

It is inconceivable that Government would approve expansion of the existing ash dam considering that the Eraring Power station operators cannot manage to contain the existing pollution being emitted on a regular basis, both into the Lake and air.

## Example 3

Following testing of the fish and crustacea in the Lake, on the 15<sup>th</sup> January this year the EPA reported to the public –

*Cadmium was detected at levels above relevant screening criteria in crabs in Lake Macquarie. To minimise exposure to cadmium, consumption of crabs caught in Lake Macquarie should be limited to*

- *Three servings per month for a child less than six years of age (one child's serving equates to 75 grams of edible crab meat)*
- *Six servings per month for all other ages (one serving for all other ages equates to 150 grams of edible crab meat).*

*The Food Standards Australia and New Zealand (FSANZ) general advice that people can safely consume 2-3 serves of seafood a week as part of a balanced diet is protective for exposure to mercury and selenium for seafood consumed from the Lake Macquarie area.*

*While we recognise that regular sampling is currently undertaken in accordance with a monitoring program approved by the EPA , there are no readily available interpretive reports based on the data that are understandable to a lay audience.*

As stated earlier, we believe the authorities concerned have an urgent responsibility to provide -

- The citizens of Lake Macquarie with regular reports on the water and air quality of Lake Macquarie. The reports to be the result of regular testing conducted by a credible, independent and impartial organisation.
- Reports to be communicated to the people of Lake Macquarie in language everyone can comprehend so they are left with a clear understanding of the threats, present and future, to their health and the Lake in general.
- Regular clear and comprehensive communication with the public about how the problems are being remedied.

Only after appropriate testing, monitoring and public reporting shows that the existing ash dam is managed in a way that does not jeopardise the health of the people and the environment should any proposition to expand the Eraring ash dam be considered.

We thank the panel for its careful consideration of the matters raised in this submission and other elements that effect the health of the citizens and marine life of Lake Macquarie.

Yours faithfully  
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David Ransom  
David Tait  
Bruce MacFarlane  
James Horn  
KLMC committee

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