IPC Submission
Objection: Restart of Redbank Power Station SSD-56284960

I strongly object to Verdant Earth's Restart of Redbank biomass power station proposal.

Verdant Earth's (VET) proposal to burn 850,000 tonnes of woody biomass per year (modifying a coal tailings furnace to burn wood products) is not green, clean or renewable.

The proponent suggests:

- that the wood supply for the Redbank Power Station will initially be sourced from invasive native species cleared from farmlands west of Singleton, within 400km of the Redbank site, claiming energy generated from burning this wood will be a carbon neutral source of energy.

Claims of 'carbon neutrality' by VET are not quantified, with the DPI's apparent acceptance of the proponent's 'offsetting' of emissions remaining unassessed and unquestioned. Where is the detail of the offset arrangements?

Burning wood for electricity is a highly polluting process which emits more carbon dioxide per kilowatt hour of energy produced than burning coal.

Burning wood biomass emits 50% more CO2 per MWh of energy produced than coal, as well as emissions of methane (CH4) and nitrogen dioxide (N2O) which are many times more destructive to climate and air quality, and to the health of communities living in close proximity to the emissions stack.

The energy required to clear the land, process the bulldozed trees into woodchips, dry and haul the material by road to Cessnock is enormous with plans to burn the wood additional to emissions produced in sourcing the feedstock.

Burning 850,000 tonnes of wood will result in the release of some 1.3 million tonnes of CO2 each year (just at the stack).

There will be additional emissions from:

- debris and soils at the clearing sites, and from processing and transporting woodchips.
- establishing, maintaining and harvesting purpose grown biomass crops.

It is clear that a comprehensive assessment of the potential emissions generated by this proposal have not been fully accounted.

One fact that can be relied upon is that trees growing in the ground sequester CO2 and that land clearing releases this carbon into the atmosphere. Processing and burning the land clearing residues cannot be considered 'avoided' emissions as this proposal will generate extra emissions in clearing, processing and haulage - then combust the end product on the power station site.

In effect, this proposal creates a market for farmers to clear land, adding to biodiversity loss, instead of sequestering living carbon in regenerating trees and shrubs, the cleared land will not be regrowing biomass feedstock, but likely returned to grazing or cropping.

The impacts on remnant native vegetation, threatened species and habitat loss, soil erosion and sedimentation in local water catchments has not been comprehensively assessed at the scale proposed when clearing land for power station feedstock.

NSW Biodiversity Crisis

The proponent has done no assessment of the environmental harm or emissions generated from what the is characterised as “much needed” land clearing, or any consideration of harm to threatened species habitats, soils and water catchments impacted when creating a market demand that incentivises land clearing.
There will be additional negative impacts of heavy haulage on local roads, traffic congestion and truck exhaust on surrounding local areas.

Risk factors

Financial investment in polluting biomass undermines investment in genuine renewables such as solar and wind.

Internationally, the biomass energy industry has come under increasing scrutiny, with claims of carbon neutrality and sustainable wood sources being discredited as local communities object to the health impacts of poor air quality, loss of forest habitats and destruction of nature in order to sustain financial viability of wood pellet manufacture and biomass energy projects.

Burning trees to generate electricity is socially and environmentally unacceptable. This project will generate air pollutants including particulates, volatile organic compounds (VOCs), methane, nitrous oxide, sulphur dioxide, lead and mercury.

The stated biomass feedstock will be required to be trucked hundreds of kilometres in B-double trucks. At least 56 arriving (and leaving) every day.

The Restart of Redbank Power Station using biomass is neither viable, clean, green or renewable! NSW needs to encourage investment in genuine renewable energy projects that are of benefit to the whole community, protect the environment and public health.

Trees are worth more standing to draw down excess atmospheric CO2. The Hunter Valley deserves clean energy development that improves air quality and delivers better health outcomes for families and the community.

I urge the NSW Independent Planning Commission to reject this proposal.

sincerely,

Meredith Stanton