OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY PRESIDENT
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

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1 August 2025

Submission to the Independent Planning Commission of New South Wales

Re: Development Application – Restart Redbank Power Station

Dear Commissioners,

As a Member of the NSW Legislative Council, I write in strong support of the development application for the conversion and restart of the dormant Redbank Power Station located in the Hunter Valley.

This project presents a rare convergence of environmental responsibility, infrastructure efficiency, and energy security – vital elements which are all critically needed as New South Wales transitions toward a cleaner and more resilient energy future.

If approved the project will provide the following benefits to New South Wales:

1. A Reliable Source of Electricity

The Redbank Power Station will use biomass, a renewable fuel source, to generate 1,000,000 MWh of electricity per year – which is enough electricity to power approximately 200,000 homes across the state. This will not only support NSW's transition to renewable energy, but more importantly, its energy security by ensuring an increased supply of baseload power that is readily available at any given time on any given day.

The need for reliable 24/7 baseload power has become increasingly pronounced in recent years, especially as the state's electricity capacity has been slashed and the people of NSW have been asked to limit their energy use during periods of peak demand.

For example, in December 2023, the NSW Energy Minister Penny Sharpe enacted a Government Energy Action Response Protocol and called on households and businesses to reduce their energy consumption. At the time the Minister urged people to turn up their air conditioning to over 24 degrees and not use their dryers, dishwashers, or pool pumps because "every small bit of action that we take will make it much easier to make sure that the grid stays on and there's not a problem."[1]

[1] Sean Tarek Goodwin and Tom Saunders (2023), 'Households across NSW told to reduce electricity usage tonight as temperatures soar', ABC News, 14 December, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-12-14/nsw-heatwave-electricity-usage-power-supply/103228552

A similar Government Energy Action Response Protocol was enacted in November 2024 after the Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO) warned of insufficient generation available to meet electricity demand in NSW. As a result the NSW Premier, Chris Minns, issued a public plea asking people not to use their pool filter, dishwasher, and washing machine so as to 'help the grid'.[2]

Attempting to avoid blackouts in such a way because not enough electricity has been generated is frankly unacceptable in a modern and developed economy. As such the proposed restart of Redbank Power Station should be looked upon favourably as it will provide much-needed dispatchable baseload power, improve grid stability, and help mitigate the kinds of shortages that we've seen in the past few years – a trend that I fear will only continue as electricity demand continues to grow in NSW and Australia.

It should also be noted that having steady and reliable power is essential for our modern economy because it allows industry to operate without hindrance, which is crucial for all sectors irrespective of their size or economic activity, and enables subsequent employment throughout the community.

2. A Carbon-Neutral Solution Aligned with Net-Zero Goals

The conversion and restart of the Redbank Power Station should also be supported because it positively aligns with the State Government's environmental and emissions reduction objectives in an efficient and productive way.

Using up to 700,000 dry tonnes of sustainably sourced biomass annually – the majority of which will be from approved land clearing operations and purpose grown energy crops – the project represents an innovative carbon-neutral model of power generation. This, in large part, is thanks to a closed-loop system where carbon released during combustion is recaptured through regrowth, therefore maintaining a net-zero balance.

That is why biomass energy is widely supported by leading international climate bodies such as the International Energy Agency (IEA) as a crucial component of decarbonisation. [3]

It is also worth noting that biomass holds a unique position in the renewables landscape because it is the only method capable of producing electricity 24/7 whilst simultaneously achieving negative CO2 emissions through carbon capture and storage. In the case of Redbank Power Station, its purpose grown energy crops will effectively serve as long-term and renewable carbon sinks which have the potential to absorb more emissions than what is generated.

This balance between environmental responsibility and energy security is precisely the kind of innovation that we should be encouraging as we move toward our climate targets – especially since the slowdown in wind farm developments, which produce intermittent power, is set to leave Australia drastically short of the Federal Government's 2030 goal of 82 percent renewable energy.[4]

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[2] Alexi Demetriadi and David Tanner (2024), 'Premier Minns' reduction plea helps keep NSW blackouts at bay', The Australian, 27 November, https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/turn-off-your-dishwasher-or-risk-blackouts-says-premier-chris-minns/news-story/8d646edce3f3134e332743c4ccc1b046

[3] IAEA (2024), "Renewable Fuels", in *Renewables 2024: Analysis and Forecast to 2030*, pp. 126-127, https://www.iea.org/reports/renewables-2024

[4] Paul Garvey and Perry Williams (2025), 'Labor's energy target all miss and wind as turbine construction slumps', The Australian, 30 July, https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/politics/turbine-construction-slump-labors-energy-target-all-miss-and-wind/news-story/96909d29b83b5aa80287b46c6cff6c0c

A carbon-neutral project like Redbank Power Station will therefore not only help the environment by reducing emissions from electricity generation, but also, the achievement of climate targets that we are currently behind schedule on and unlikely to meet.

Furthermore, it is important to recognise that since the project is not reliant on the sun or wind for electricity generation it will not be subjected to the volatility of weather and climate. This is especially advantageous considering the recent wind slump where a shortage of windy days pushed east-coast electricity prices to their highest levels in three years.[5]

3. Infrastructure Efficiency and Minimal Community Disruption

Another major reason for supporting this project is the valuable strategic advantage offered by Redbank Power Station's existing transmission infrastructure and connection to the electricity grid.

This crucial factor eliminates the need for new transmission lines across rural landscapes which have become a point of friction in many regional communities – particularly for landholders and local councils. Repurposing a dormant asset like Redbank Power Station would therefore not only ensure the faster delivery of electricity compared to entirely new energy projects, but also, much lower disruption to the community and more efficient use of public and private resources.

Beyond its efficient use of dormant infrastructure and delivery of much-needed baseload power, it is also worth noting that the conversion and restart of Redbank Power Station will also deliver significant economic and social benefits to the wider community.

The project is expected to deliver up to 1,000 direct and indirect jobs to the Hunter Valley region, helping local workers, contractors, and suppliers, as well as $1 billion in economic stimulus to the NSW economy. These timely and meaningful boosts demonstrate how the Redbank Power Station is not just an innovative energy project that reduces carbon emissions, but also, a regional development opportunity with broad public benefit.

Final Remarks

In summary, the Redbank Power Station proposal represents a unique opportunity to address several of the state's most pressing energy challenges through a single and integrated project.

It is a forward-thinking endeavour that delivers:

- Dependable baseload power supply for NSW homes, businesses, and industries;
- Clean and carbon-neutral electricity at scale;
- Smart re-use of existing infrastructure with minimal community impact.

At a time when public confidence in the energy system is increasingly being tested, largely due to generation shortfalls and the uncertainty surrounding the pace of renewable infrastructure delivery, it is vital that we pursue practical and immediate solutions that can help stabilise the electricity grid, support emissions reduction targets, and deliver tangible economic benefits without causing major community disruption.

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[5] Nick Toscano (2025), 'Wind slump pushes power prices to highest level in recent years', Brisbane Times, 31 July, https://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/business/consumer-affairs/wind-slump-pushes-power-prices-to-highest-level-in-recent-years-20250730-p5mixj.html

To that end, I respectfully encourage the Independent Planning Commission to approve the development application and unlock the full potential of the Redbank Power Station as a model for sustainable and reliable power generation in New South Wales.

Sincerely,

[redacted]

The Hon. Rod Roberts MLC
Deputy President of the Legislative Council
Parliament of New South Wales