

Submission on the Redbank Power Station Biomass Proposal

I'm writing this submission against the Redbank Power Station Biomass proposal by Verdant Earth Technologies. I am in favour of sustainable net zero power production from renewable energy, but not power produced from burning native vegetation.

The Redbank Biomass proposal intends to burn native vegetation for fuel, up to 700,000 tonnes of dried vegetation annually that will be sourced from agricultural clearing & possibly from forests in future. This will be highly destructive for our native flora & fauna & the loophole used to allow this clearing could set a precedent for forest clearing in the future.

I object to this proposal on the following grounds:

- It is unsustainable to burn tens of thousands of hectares of native vegetation. According to Verdant's own figures, 200,000 hectares of native vegetation will be cleared during the first year of the project. This vegetation would take approximately 10 years to regrow & possibly longer in marginal semi arid areas of NSW.
- I dispute the term "Invasive Native Species". I have worked for over 35 years as a professional Bush Regenerator & I disagree that naturally occurring native species are "invasive". Native plant species provide the best vegetation to stabilise & enrich soils, to prevent erosion & to provide food & habitats for native fauna. Exotic plant species are considered to be an invasive weed & to overtake the endemic native species. Some farmers may consider the regeneration of natives into their pastures to be invasive, but they are naturally occurring & best suited to the environment they grow in. It is a natural process for them to regenerate there.
- This project will give the green light to farmers to undertake unregulated land clearing & will offer a financial incentive for doing this. The clearing of native vegetation on farms has already had disastrous consequences for the biodiversity in NSW. Many species of animals & plants are now extinct or critically endangered as a result of land clearing & the fragmentation of their habitats & food sources.
- It will be impossible to regulate the extent of the proposed clearing. Land clearing laws are currently under review by the Natural Resources Commission as they are inadequate. This project will undermine future controls for land clearing on private property. NSW Labor is committed to closing the loop hole that allows the burning of vegetation for power production.
- The Verdant Company plans to source future fuel from the clearing of 72,000 ha of marginal agricultural land for growing biomass crops. This land is marginal because it is semi arid. It cannot sustain crops due to high temperatures & low rainfall. Destroying the native grasslands on it will have devastating results with soil erosion. The diverse native grassland ecosystems contain the best suited plants to survive in such a harsh environment. They cannot be easily replaced with exotic species that are repeatedly cropped. Desertification & mass erosion will ensue in the long run if the fragile native ecosystems are removed.

- The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) only covers the site of the power station. It fails to consider the negative environmental effects of clearing thousands of hectares of native vegetation across the state. The impacts of this must be included in the EIS.
- Burning native vegetation will release massive amounts of CO₂ into the atmosphere. The claims by the Verdant Company of 'near net-zero' carbon emissions are patently false. Feedstock & biomass fuels will not replace woody vegetation which takes many years to establish & mature, especially in fragile semi arid environments.
- Burning of biomass fuels (over the power plant's life cycle) releases 4 times the amount of harmful CFCs into the atmosphere than the burning of coal. This is unacceptable, CFC's destroy the ozone layer that protects life on earth from radiation.
- Global warming is increasing at an alarming rate. We have already passed 1.5 degrees of heating world wide. We cannot allow more projects that release CO₂ & other harmful gases into the atmosphere. Burning vegetation is not carbon neutral, clean or renewable. There are much safer & more sustainable alternatives with wind & solar power generation which we must utilise instead.
- The particulate pollution created from burning biomass fuels will have negative health effects that must not be allowed. Particulate pollution is a major cause of lung disease in communities & should be reduced not increased by allowing the unnecessary burning of vegetation for fuel.
- The air pollution created from trucking massive amounts of vegetation across the state to Singleton is also unacceptable. It has been estimated that the proposal for Redbank Power Station will require over 20,000 trips in & out per year. The pollution from this & the resultant congestion & wear on roads is totally unnecessary if a sustainable wind & solar energy is used instead.

For all of the above reasons I strongly oppose the Redbank Power Station Biomass proposal by Verdant Earth Technologies. I request that the IPC rejects this proposal.

