

Submission on the Winchester South Project

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Healthy planet, **healthy people.**

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Queensland Government, Department of State Development, Manufacturing, Infrastructure and Planning; Winchester South Project EPBC 2019/8460; EPBC 2019/8458; EPBC 2019/8459.¹

Proposed Actions: Winchester South Project - Mine Site and Access Road; Electricity Transmission Line; Water Pipeline

Doctors for the Environment makes one submission on all three EPBC referrals:-

Mine Site and Access Road; Electricity Transmission Line; Water Pipeline EPBC 2019/8460; EPBC 2019/8458; EPBC 2019/8459. We believe that all have potential individual, joint and accumulative impacts within the aegis of the EPBC Act.

Clearly there should be an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process for the entire project rather than individual sections of the project. This must include a human health impact assessment (HIA) because human health and the wellbeing the environment are indivisible.

With regard to impacts on Biodiversity, these must be considered in the context of the entire project because the project will impact adversely on climate change, which is the main cause of biodiversity loss nationally, in Queensland, Australia and world-wide.

Doctors for the Environment Australia

Doctors for the Environment Australia (DEA) is an independent, self-funded, non-Government organisation of medical doctors in all Australian States and Territories. Our members work across all specialties in community, hospital and private practices. We work to prevent and address the diseases - local, national and global - caused by damage to our natural environment. We are a public health voice in the sphere of environmental health with a primary focus on the health harms from pollution and climate change.

Recommendations

- The three applications must be processed together through an Environmental Impact Assessment of the entire project.
- This assessment should take into account the entire project's contribution to climate change and related impacts on biodiversity. This in turn, will need detailed water studies based on an Independent Expert Scientific Committee assessment and a human health assessment plus a cost benefit assessment of the entire project over 30 years.

Submission

It is essential that the Federal government now ensure a full Environmental Impact Assessment for every new development project which releases greenhouse emissions, using independent consensus science based on national and international expertise. This is critical, as climate disruption is a clear threat to our health and to the economic system which underpins all our human endeavours, and indeed to our civilisation.

Present expectations of world temperature rise

Australia has signed and ratified the COP24 Paris Agreement, which aims to limit “the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels”.²

Indeed the recent IPCC report demands urgent and deep reductions in greenhouse emissions and shows that if emissions are not in rapid decline by 2030, we have little chance of limiting warming to 1.5°C or even 2°C.² Their conclusion is that limiting warming to 1.5°C implies reaching net zero CO₂ emissions globally around 2050.² We note that the Winchester project would expect to produce greenhouse emissions at least until 2050.

New expectations on world temperature rise

The IPCC reports involve more than a thousand scientific experts reaching consensus and inevitably there are new scientific findings being published even before the next IPCC report is due. Whilst the IPCC is offering warnings on the 2°C temperature rise, an accumulation of findings indicates that in the absence of aggressive action, we are likely heading for an alarming 4°C rise this century.

The reports from the Royal Society in 2011³ and followed in 2013 by a comprehensive report ⁴ from the Potsdam Institute and World Bank predicted a 4°C rise before the end of this century.

This was confirmed by a study in the Journal Advances in Atmospheric Sciences which estimated there is a 74 percent chance of exceeding a rise of 4°C by the turn of the century.⁵

The latest review of these predictions from David Spratt and Ian Dunlop summarises these 4°C statements from highly esteemed scientific institutions.⁶

We note that for thirty or more years, science has modelled the consequences of steadily rising greenhouse emissions and their expected trajectories of warming have been correct. As a result, these current predictions have a high degree of confidence.

Relevance of these findings to the EPBC Act

A World and national biodiversity crisis parallels the climate crisis; they are related and augment each other. The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services summarised the problem:

“The overwhelming evidence of the IPBES Global Assessment, from a wide range of different fields of knowledge, presents an ominous picture,” said IPBES Chair, Sir Robert Watson. “The health of ecosystems on which we and all other species depend is deteriorating more rapidly than ever. We are eroding the very foundations of our economies, livelihoods, food security, health and quality of life worldwide.”⁷

In Australia the Interim Report by the Senate Inquiry into Faunal Extinction⁸, ‘*The Senate Environment and Communications References Committee Australia’s faunal extinction crisis*’, to which DEA made a submission⁹ has been released.¹⁰ It provides a damning testimony of the appalling loss of wildlife and habitats facilitated by the failures of the Federal Government to protect the environment.

The importance of these reports to Queensland and Australia relates to the need to retain and nurture its biodiversity to maintain our sustainability as a food producing resource. Biodiversity loss resulting in deteriorating soil ecology will have a critical impact on food production as detailed by the report “the State of the world’s biodiversity for food and agriculture” from the Commission on genetic resources for food and agriculture, food and agriculture organisation of the United Nations.¹¹

Within Queensland the impact of the steady and relentless rise in emissions will result in the loss to both the Great Barrier Reef and the northern tropical rainforest. Indeed, the science currently indicates that the reef along with other world reef systems has only a small chance of survival.¹²

The role of the federal government through the EPBC Act

The powers of the federal government to influence the machinations of state governments to produce assessments within the overall national

interest is currently very limited. Reform is needed and the new Minister of the Environment has alluded to this.

Questions that need answering are:

In national and international terms is there a case for this new metallurgical coal mine (in contrast to thermal coal, where there is no case for further developments).

If so, is there an economic case for this mine, taking into account a 30-year life span is incompatible with climate needs and with the rapid development of furnace heating systems other than coal. This economic assessment must utilise full cost accounting.

If so, the health and environmental consequences of a constrained development must be assessed.

If so, the nexus between climate change and biodiversity loss must open the way to a wider assessment by the federal government through the existing EPBC Act.

In turn this offers the opportunity for the government to create a system that gives rapid certainty to developers, reduces the risk of stranded assets and takes account of harms to human health and biodiversity.

References

¹ <http://www.dsdmip.qld.gov.au/assessments-and-approvals/winchester-south-project.html>

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⁵ Wang X, Jiang D, Lang X. Climate Change of 4°C Global Warming above Pre-industrial Levels. Advances in Atmospheric Sciences. 2018;35(7):757-70.

⁶ David Spratt and Ian Dunlop. Existential climate-related security risk: A scenario approach. Melbourne: Breakthrough - National Centre for Climate Restoration; May 2019 May 2019. https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/148cb0_a1406e0143ac4c469196d3003bc1e687.pdf

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https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Environment_and_Communications/Faunalexinction

⁹ <https://www.dea.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Australia's-faunal-extinction-crisis-submission-08-18.pdf>

¹⁰ Parliament of Australia. Australia's faunal extinction crisis. Canberra; 2019.
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¹² L. Hughes , M. Rice and A. Dean,. Lethal Consequences: Climate Change impacts on the Great Barrier Reef. Climate Council; 2018.
<https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/resources/climate-change-great-barrier-reef/>