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APEC: Australia's Coal Agenda

The Howard Government's response to the threat of climate change is dictated by one overriding priority: protect Australia' export coal industry.

Burning coal is the biggest single contributor to climate change in Australia and globally. Australia is the world's largest exporter of coal, and coal is Australia's largest export commodity. Newcastle is the world's largest coal export port, and has recently been given approval to double its capacity.

At a time when the scientific community are issuing urgent warnings that we have a closing window to make massive cuts in greenhouse gas emissions, Australia is massively expanding its coal industry.

Both the Federal Government and State Labor Governments are signing off on plans for a huge expansion of coal export infrastructure and new coal mines. New coal fired power stations are also on the agenda as the gap between climate change rhetoric and reality widens.

Prime Minister John Howard's APEC agenda is consistent with this. The Government is using APEC as a way of undermining international efforts to expand and strengthen the Kyoto Protocol as this would impact Australia's coal industry. In particular, Mr Howard wants to use APEC to head off a new round of binding greenhouse gas reduction targets, and instead see the international community agree that long-term targets for greenhouse gas reductions should be merely aspirational. Aspirational targets will do nothing to slow climate change, nor Australia's booming exports of coal.

For Howard, APEC's real meaning is **A**ustralia **P**ushing **E**xport **C**oal.

During the week of APEC alone, Australia will export roughly 4.4 million tonnes of coal, causing over $1.2 billion worth of damage due to climate change…

Australian coal causing climate chaos

- The Australian coal industry exports 230 million tonnes of coal. This gives rise to greenhouse gas emissions of 598 million tonnes - more than Australia's total domestic greenhouse emissions from all sources (560Mt);
- The coal industry claims that Australia's coal exports are worth $24 billion. Yet using the Stern Review's estimates for the cost of the damage caused by greenhouse emissions from this coal, Australia's coal emissions will cause about $66 billion worth of damage globally each year;
- Each of the ships being loaded at Newcastle can carry up to 180,000 tonnes of coal, equivalent to 468,000 tonnes of greenhouse pollution, and about $52 million worth of damage;
- Australia is extremely vulnerable to climate change. It is the driest inhabited continent, with much of its population living on the coast. Rising temperatures, increased drought and sea-levels will impact Australia severely. Every tonne of coal that Australia exports will come back as climate change.

During the week of APEC…

- Australia will export roughly 4.4 million tonnes of coal, giving rise to over 11 million tonnes of greenhouse pollution and causing over $1.2 billion worth of damage globally;
- The port of Newcastle alone will export 1.6 million tonnes of coal, giving rise to over 4 million tonnes of greenhouse pollution and about half a billion dollars worth of damage globally;

Newcastle: world's largest coal export port…. and growing…

The coastal town of Newcastle, north of Sydney, is the world's largest coal export port with a capacity to move 102 million tonnes of coal each year (Mtpa). The State and Federal Government recently signed off on new infrastructure projects that will double Newcastle's capacity to 209 Mtpa.

To put this 209Mtpa in perspective, this will lead to greenhouse gas emissions nearly as great as Australia's total greenhouse emissions, and based on the Stern Review's estimate of the social cost of carbon, it will lead to nearly $60 billion worth of damage.

Why so-called ‘clean coal’ is no solution

1. So called ‘clean coal’ – the capture and burying of greenhouse pollution - is unproven and will not be available for at least 15 years, if it works at all. Commercialisation at a level necessary to significantly reduce global greenhouse emissions will take even longer. Given the need for immediate cuts in emissions, clean coal will not be ready in time to help, if it works at all. Meanwhile, low cost zero emissions technologies like renewables and efficiency are ready to go now.
2. CCS cannot capture all emissions from a power station nor can it be applied to all power stations, so that even it were used widely in Australia and overseas, greenhouse emissions would not fall or stabilise but actually continue to increase.
3. CCS is not necessarily safe or secure from leakage. Emissions must be kept secure for centuries, far longer than any of the companies promoting the technology have even been in business. It is most secure for fossil fuels to be left underground.
4. Even if CCS becomes available, it will be more expensive than a plethora of zero emission renewable and energy efficiency options that are available right now.

A detailed briefing about the myth of clean coal can be found online at:
http://www.greenpeace.org/raw/content/australia/resources/fact-sheets/climate-change/pipe-dreams-why-australia-is.pdf

Renewables can replace coal

There are many sources of renewable energy that can provide reliable electricity to supply our baseload needs as well as our peak demand. To make this happen, we must introduce policies specifically designed to grow the renewable energy industry, such as those that have been successful in many other countries.

Currently in Australia, only eight per cent of our electricity comes from renewable energy. In comparison, Sweden sources over 50 per cent of its electricity from renewable energy (mostly hydro and bioenergy), and has a target to increase this to 60 per cent by 2010. Major energy economies like California plan to fast track renewables to provide 20 per cent of electricity by 2010 and 33 per cent by 2020.

Combined with ambitious energy efficiency programs, we could start turning off the most polluting coal-fired power stations within a few years. Australian state and federal governments have agreed that 30 per cent of electricity demand could be eliminated with no impact on energy services and with significant financial, jobs and greenhouse benefits.

The barriers to a clean energy economy are political. The coal industry is standing in the way of a clean energy future for Australia with the support of state and federal governments.
For a detailed vision for a global renewable energy revolution:
http://www.greenpeace.org/raw/content/australia/resources/reports/climate-change/greenpeace-energy-vision-repo.pdf

A just transition for Newcastle

A just transition is a process to protect vulnerable coalmining communities as they make the shift to sustainable industries. A just transition creates partnerships between communities, trade unions, governments and businesses to promote sustainable development. Hunter Valley communities are increasingly ready for the transition.

In February, 2005, Singleton’s mayor, Fred Harvison, announced that he wanted Singleton Shire’s eastern half to be a mine free zone after decades of mining had left the western half a “lunar landscape”. The mayor noted, “we don’t want to end up with a despoiled area and no future prospects”.

Newcastle has already shown how to make the transition from unsustainable industries. When BHP closed its Newcastle steel works in the 1990s, many predicted the town would also close down. But Newcastle has undergone a vibrant renaissance and is now a hub for wine, tourism, filmmaking and other arts. Newcastle City Council champions a plan to turn the city into a clean-energy centre of excellence and leads the way with its energy efficiency initiatives. Just as Newcastle has made a successful transition from steel, Greenpeace wants to help coal communities create a future based on sustainable jobs and wealth; one that does not damage the environment or the global climate.

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