

2025 consultation

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Disclaimer

This document is a submission to the Net Zero Commission’s 2025 consultation. As part of the consultation process, the commission has committed to publishing the submissions it receives. Submissions do not represent the views of the commission.



To whom it may concern,

Below please see our submission on NSW Net Zero Commission.

We can't reach Net Zero by waving through massive new coal mine expansions.

NSW Productivity and Equality Commission stated in November 2024:

“That current progress is not enough. That legislated, bipartisan targets say that by 2030 we should have cut emission by 50% from 2005 levels, with cuts reaching 70% by 2035. But the latest NSW Government projections find us falling short of both. Moreover we are well off track for net zero by 2050.

Many activities need policy change to reduce emissions. They range from trucking, rail, aviation, coastal shipping to domestic gas use, to fugitive emissions from coal mining, and methane emissions from agriculture. Carbon offsetting such as rewilding and direct air capture cannot absorb emissions at a level that would allow these activities to carry on.

Many decisions that will determine the level of 2050 emissions involve long lived capital items. Current policy settings are blocking that investment. To shape 2050 outcomes we need new incentives for private investment in near zero emissions, manufacturing processes, heavy freight, and passenger transport. Clear signals about how we use natural gas and decisions about the future of coal mining.

The longer we wait, the more it will cost us to fix the emissions shortfall.

Any emissions increases associated with extended or expanded projects would require all other sectors to make greater emissions reductions if the state is to meet its emissions reduction targets.

We are not experts in this area, but understand a simple science, that we need to scale back coal, expansions, emissions and charge ahead with renewables.

I provide the following information from Lock The Gate and their expertise.

Kyogle Environment Group takes a keen interest in this area to ensure a safe future for our children and grandchildren and other species that we share this planet with.

Yours,

Kyogle Environment Group

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We acknowledge with respect the Gulli-bul people of the Bundjalung Nation as the traditional custodians of this beautiful land

Four key points in relation to Coal mine expansions:

1. The Joint Standing Committee on Net Zero in the NSW Parliament has highlighted concerns about proposed coal mining expansions and called for an urgent dedicated report on the risks that coal mining poses from the NZC
2. The NSW Productivity and Equality Commission has produced a recent report in its Net Zero series which suggests that a key policy direction to achieve climate targets in NSW could include setting ‘a clear deadline for decommissioning thermal coal mining for export’.

1. The current regulatory system is not working to prevent major greenhouse gas emissions from coal mine expansions:

The EPA has developed a Large Emitters Guide but it is not binding and key elements have not been implemented in recent coal mine decisions – including the Mt Arthur Mod 2 and HVO Mod 8 decisions. Proponents have not been required to reduce emissions on the same trajectory as NSW nor to set emission reduction objectives.

Furthermore, coal companies are applying for projects that do not even commence until after 2030, but the NSW Government is progressing them through the planning system regardless – ie the Maules Ck coal expansion does not commence until 2036 but an EIS is expected next month. This enables companies to ‘bank’ approvals that will require vast compensation if they have to be stopped in the future on climate grounds.

Lastly, it is clear that the Safeguard Mechanism has failed to lead to any genuine emissions reduction from coal projects in NSW. A recent report by Common Capital found, shockingly, that “

BHP, Glencore, Stanmore Resources and Whitehaven are

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projected to earn Safeguard Mechanism Credits for every tonne of coal produced until 2050, as their baselines are, on average, set significantly above current emissions intensity”. This effectively means that these miners are earning credits for doing nothing on emissions reduction under the Safeguard Mechanism, right out until 2050.

2. The large scale methane under-report from coal mines that has been identified by numerous studies is not being considered in coal expansion decisions

Numerous studies have found that methane emissions are likely to be at least double the amount reported by coal companies, but that fact is not considered in the assessment process and coal company figures are accepted as a valid estimate of emissions. The Common Capital report (see above) found that methane emissions from coal are predicted to rise by 75% by 2035 in NSW, despite the International Energy Agency saying they must reduce by 75% by 2030 if the world is to avoid climate chaos.

3. The short-term global warming potential of methane at 84-87 times the warming potential of carbon dioxide over 20 years is not being considered.

Methane is a vastly more powerful warming agent than carbon dioxide over 20 years, but that fact is not considered in the NSW assessment process. Instead, methane

emissions are converted to greenhouse gas emissions using a 100-year global warming potential, which dramatically underestimates the climate impact over the short term. It is inappropriate to use the 100 year global warming potential for methane when the key considerations are impacts over the coming 10 years to 2035 on NSW climate targets. The short term GWP should be used to properly quantify the short-term emissions and properly assess the near term risk of exceeding near term global tipping points.

4. The full lifecycle emissions including downstream emissions are not being given sufficient weight in decision-making.

Lock the Gate's analysis of proposed coal expansions shows that there are 19 new coal projects in the planning system (with at least another 5 proposed) that would produce more than 1.7 billion tonnes of lifecycle emissions, which represents more than 15 times NSW current annual emissions. Given the purpose of the Climate

Change (Net Zero Future) Act 2023 includes limiting global temperatures to as near as possible to 1.5 degrees, the downstream emissions must be fully assessed - and given their scale - should provide another reason why coal expansions must be rejected.

Recommendations

We are calling for the NZC to use their powers under the Climate Change (Net Zero Future) Act 2023 as follows:

1. Urgently use your functions under s15 1d) of the Act to provide a dedicated report on the risks posed by proposed coal expansions to NSW climate targets and outline the policy changes needed to address it, including putting forward a phase-down plan as proposed by the NSW Productivity Commission to prevent any further coal mine expansions.
2. Use your powers under s15 2g) of the Act to set stringent coal sectoral targets for 2030 and 2035 and mandate abatement requirements to reduce emissions from existing coal mines.
3. Use your powers under s15 3) of the Act to provide advice to the IPC on Moolarben and Hunter Valley Operations coal mine expansions to set a standard for greenhouse gas assessment that reflects the NZC's view on the risks posed by coal projects to NSW.

In relation to the NZC interest in supporting economic diversification and transition in coal-affected regions:

1. The proposed Future Jobs and Investment Authorities fall far short of what is needed to deliver local and community-led statutory transition authorities with clear lines of authority direct to the Department of Premier and Cabinet and a revised approach is needed.
2. The Royalties for Rejuvenation Fund is being banked by the NSW Government until 2028 and should instead start to be deployed urgently so that concrete diversification projects can commence and communities are able to see the types of outcomes that are possible.

2025 consultation questions

1. What can you tell us about your experience of the impacts of climate change and how can the commission seek to reflect and respond to this in its work?	With urgency, we must address that NSW is not on track to meet any of the legislated targets (incl. 2030 and 2035 GHG targets) reductions and that we see concrete effects of climate catastrophe at the same time the talk is of adaption, when mitigation through the cancellation of future coal projects must be upscaled to deal with the emergency
2. What actions can the commission take to engage across the community to help drive the shifts needed for the net zero transition and for effective climate change mitigation and adaptation?	Coal mine expansions are undermining NSW climate targets. The current regulatory system is not working to prevent major greenhouse gas emissions from coal mine expansions. Coal companies are applying for projects that do not even commence until after 2030, but the NSW Government is progressing them through the planning system regardless, letting companies "bank" approvals. The Safeguard Mechanism cannot be relied upon to drive emissions reductions from coal projects in NSW required to meet 2030 and 2035 targets.*
3. How should the commission best engage with First Nations people to learn about cultural knowledge and practices to support adaptation, and what information and evidence should it draw on to inform its understanding of these practices?	This question applies to everyone. Government at all levels need to inform community on the reality of what's at stake. Communities need resources and power to respond and adapt to the impacts of climate change. Invest deeply and long-term in community-centred, genuinely co-designed resilience planning, in climate-ready health, housing and disaster support services.
4. What additional mechanisms, support, or incentives can meaningfully empower and enhance First Nations people's involvement in climate mitigation, adaptation and environmental stewardship?	This question seems irrelevant to the scale and severity of the problem, Everyone will be affected and required to adapt
5. What additional information and evidence should the commission consider when assessing progress towards NSW's targets for reducing net greenhouse gas emissions?	Fugitive coal mine methane emissions are under-reported and underestimated. Methane is 84-87x more potent than CO2 over 20 years and coal mine fugitive emissions are likely under estimated by at least half, but this isn't accounted for in company estimates of their scope 1 emissions - and must be.

	The Common Capital report (see above) found that methane emissions from coal are predicted to rise by 75% by 2035 in NSW, despite the International Energy Agency saying they must reduce by 75% by 2030 if the world is to avoid climate chaos.
6. The speed of deployment of electricity generation and infrastructure is a key risk to emissions reduction targets. What more could be done to fast-track deployment?	Downstream emissions aren't properly counted. The 19 proposed coal projects in NSW could generate ~1.7 billion tonnes of lifecycle emissions - over 15 times NSWs annual emissions. Despite this massive impact, these emissions are not being properly considered in planning decisions. They must be given full weight under the Climate Change (Net Zero Future) Act 2023 to ensure decisions align with NSWs climate goals.
7. Are the measures now in place sufficient to ensure community engagement and benefit sharing from the build out of infrastructure for the energy transition?	Coal communities need a fair transition The Royalties for Rejuvenation fund should be spent on the transition now - it's already underway. Don't bank it until 2028. Transition authorities must be independent, well-funded and community-led.
8. Are First Nations communities adequately engaged and included in sharing the benefits of the transition? What more could be done, and by whom?	
9. What are likely to prove the most effective approaches to accelerate rapid decarbonisation across freight and passenger transport?	If NSW fails to meet it's 2030 targets then transport will be one of the industries to be penalised to make up the shortfall. Better not to approve or extend any more coal mines
10. What specific actions or policies could increase uptake of emissions reduction strategies in agriculture, both in the short and long term?	Deal with the methane issue from livestock
11. Given the uncertainties in land-sector net emissions, how should NSW incorporate this sector into the states climate policy and emissions profile?	Stop the logging of our natural assets in the forestry sector. Transition jobs and logging to plantations

12. What specific actions could increase carbon storage and resilience of the existing carbon stock in the land sector and meaningfully enhance the application of First Nations people's knowledge and practices?	
13. What policies or programs at a sectoral level could complement the Safeguard Mechanism to support the accelerated decarbonisation of heavy industry in NSW?	
14. What measures could accelerate industrial heat electrification in NSW, where technology is viable?	
15. What short to medium term measures could be prioritised to address the systemic challenges regarding waste generation and resource recovery?	
16. How could transparency of how coal mines meet their Safeguard Mechanism obligations be improved?	
17. What measures would lead to coal mines prioritising on-site abatement over offsetting?	
18. What measures should be considered beyond the Safeguard Mechanism to reduce emissions of the resources sector, particularly methane emissions, to meet NSW's emissions reduction targets?	

19. What additional measures could accelerate electrification and increase energy efficiency of new and existing buildings?	
20. How could social equity be better addressed in the transition to an electrified built environment?	
21. What approaches could NSW consider to eliminate refrigerants with a GWP >10 from buildings?	
22. What should be included in an emissions monitoring framework for NSW in the context of the transition to net zero, including any specific metrics and indicators?	
23. The adaptation objective is for NSW to be more resilient to a changing climate. The Act allows for regulations to further define the adaptation objective. What does a more resilient NSW look like to you?	
24. What additional information and evidence should the commission consider when assessing progress towards the adaptation objective?	
25. How can adaptation planning better use the NSW Government's climate change projections (NARClIM)?	Adaption is greenwashing.
26. What other information or tools are needed to support decision-makers in NSW?	Get carbon emissions down trough closing coal mines and move to renewable energy. Publish a report on how coal expansions threaten climate targets and policy changes needed to address it.

	Set strong coal sectoral targets for 2030 and 2035 and mandate methane abatement requirements to reduce emissions from existing coal mines. Provide advice to the IPC on Moolarben and Hunter Valley Operations coal mine expansions to set a standard for greenhouse gas assessment that reflects the NZCs view on the risks posed by coal projects to NSW.
27. What initiatives should the commission consider in assessing NSW's preparation and responses to extreme heat and humidity events in NSW?	
Are there any other pieces of evidence or feedback you would like to add?	Publish a report on how coal expansions threaten climate targets and policy changes needed to address it. Set strong coal sectoral targets for 2030 and 2035 and mandate methane abatement requirements to reduce emissions from existing coal mines. Provide advice to the IPC on Moolarben and Hunter Valley Operations coal mine expansions to set a standard for greenhouse gas assessment that reflects the NZCs view on the risks posed by coal projects to NSW. Coal mine expansions are getting away with polluting massive amounts of greenhouse gas emissions - the regulatory system designed to constrain them is not working. Methane leaking from coal mines is under-reported and under-accounted for as identified in numerous studies - yet this bloat of emissions is not being considered in coal expansion decisions. The superheating potential of methane emitted from coal mines is currently not being considered - at 84-87 times the warming potential of carbon dioxide over 20 years, this poses a huge threat to our climate if not properly managed. The full lifecycle emissions of a coal expansion, including downstream emissions, are not being given sufficient weight in decision-making. Communities need the resources and power to respond and adapt to the impacts of climate change. Coal regions need fast, fair and locally led transition investment Coal mine expansions are undermining NSW climate targets. NSW is not on track to meet any of the legislated targets (incl. 2030 and 2035 GHG targets). The current regulatory system is not working to prevent major greenhouse gas emissions from coal mine expansions.

Coal companies are applying for projects that do not even commence until after 2030, but the NSW Government is progressing them through the planning system regardless, letting companies ,Banks approvals.

The Safeguard Mechanism cannot be relied upon to drive emissions reductions from coal projects in NSW required to meet 2030 and 2035 targets.*

2. Fugitive coal mine methane emissions are under-reported and underestimated.

Methane is 84-87x more potent than CO₂ over 20 years and coal mine fugitive emissions are likely under estimated by at least half, but this isn't accounted for in company estimates of their scope 1 emissions - and must be.

The Common Capital report (see above) found that methane emissions from coal are predicted to rise by 75% by 2035 in NSW, despite the International Energy Agency saying they must reduce by 75% by 2030 if the world is to avoid climate chaos.4.

3. Downstream emissions aren't properly counted.

The 19 proposed coal projects in NSW could generate ~1.7 billion tonnes of lifecycle emissions - over 15 times NSWs annual emissions. Despite this massive impact, these emissions are not being properly considered in planning decisions. They must be given full weight under the Climate Change (Net Zero Future) Act 2023 to ensure decisions align with NSWs climate goals.

4. Communities need resources and power to respond and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Invest deeply and long-term in community-centred, genuinely co-designed resilience planning, in climate-ready health, housing and disaster support services.

5. Coal communities need a fair transition

The Royalties for Rejuvenation fund should be spent on the transition now - it's already underway. Don't bank it until 2028. Transition authorities must be independent, well-funded and community-led