

WEST WALLSEND BRANCH



AUSTRALIAN
LABOR
PARTY

Secretary

Bernard Griffin

President

Brian Adamthwaite

30th March 2014

Commission Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communication
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Secretary,

The West Wallsend Branch members all live in the electorate of Charlton situated in Lake Macquarie City Council in NSW.

At the March meeting of the West Wallsend Branch of the ALP, members were apprised of the senate hearing into "offsets" by the secretary. As a result of the appraisal members asked that the branch forward a short submission to the committee relaying members experience in local "rorts" from a developer and the office of Environment and Heritage NSW regarding local offsets for an environmentally destructive development by Hammersmith, a division of Rouche Investments.

In 2009 DA 1130/2009 was lodged by Hammersmith for 463 dwellings on the last remaining bushland to the east of West Wallsend and Holmesville. Although the DA was ultimately rejected by the JRPP on a number of grounds it is interesting to note that the offsets offered were not local "like for like" but 1800ha at Brimbin, 160 kms away to the north near Taree..

The DA was resubmitted later under the guise of DA113/2011 and ultimately approved. While smaller in house numbers it only included some local offsets and a further 178 ha. at Brimbin.

Clearly the main driver for the offsets is the NSW OE and H which is 'happy' to use offsets to bolster its drive to increase its reserves and it simply ignores its own guidelines on making offsets locally meaningful.

Branch members believe that the OE and H colludes with developers and has its own agenda which ignores the needs and aspirations of local people in their local area. Members were also annoyed that the local council did not dispute the offsets from OE and H despite offsets outside the LMCC area being against council policy.

Members believe that there is far too much collusion and influence

between the government departments and developers. It seems that when it comes to level playing fields the environment is situated on the face of the Eiger and getting a fair deal for the environment is as remote as getting a hot cup of coffee or tea near the top of Mt. Everest.

Members call upon the Senate to recommend that when it comes to offsets that local residential input is required and the developers/coal mines proponents etc. must meet properly scientifically prepared offset requirements prepared by scientists/ecologists **who are not connected with the DA proponents.**

It seems to members that when proponents are involved they influence the outcome in a negative way and collude with government departments to ensure that the proponents DA's are always successful. It is almost an impossibility to find a development proposal that has been stopped unless opponents are able to afford a court challenge.

Two examples stand out. Whitehaven Coal and the Laird State Forest where the approved offsets are demonstrably not like for like but have been approved anyway. Here in the Hunter Valley Rio Tinto is to mine offsets that were to be preserved in perpetuity near Bulga in 2003 but handed to them on a plate after the NSW government changed the "goal posts". Offsets to be 100 kms. away! The government has even changed aspects of the court act to make environmental groups applications difficult and at a disadvantage.

Thanking you in anticipation of including this submission.

Yours sincerely

Bernard Griffin
Branch Secretary