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RETIREMENT OF COAL FIRED POWER STATIONS

Dandenong Ranges Renewable Energy Association Inc or DRREA has just over 50 members in the outer South East of Melbourne.

We support the retirement of coal fired power stations for a number of well documented reasons that are outlined below.

Reducing emissions

To limit global temperature increases to 1.5 degrees by reducing global emissions the world (including Australia) needs to change the way it generates electricity. This means closing old, inefficient coal fired power stations and replacing them with emissions free forms of electricity generation.

Better health outcomes

The negative health impacts of coal dust and the burning of coal are well documented especially in regard to respiratory impacts. The closure of coal fired power stations will result in better health for people living in former coal communities.

Jobs

A transition to 100% renewable electricity should be pursued as quickly as possible to reduce emissions. This will create a lot of employment and more than offset job losses in coal communities.

To illustrate this point we highlight the example of the 2013 'Stationary Energy Plan' by Beyond Zero Emissions and the Melbourne University Energy Research Institute.

It found that Australia's transition to 100% Renewable Energy in 10 years would create just over 80,000 jobs (Australia wide) from installation and 45,000 continuing jobs in operations and maintenance.¹⁰⁸

A 'just' transition

Workers in coal communities deserve a 'just' transition out of coal and into sustainable industries. One example is the Earthworker Co-operative in Morwell which aims to build tanks for solar hot water systems. Initiatives like this should be encouraged and supported.

As minimum, workers in coal communities should receive the same provisions as workers in the auto industry. Power companies should contribute to these costs.

Clean up costs

Rehabilitation of power stations and coal mines is not cheap. The cost should be borne by the power companies that profited from their operation as part of the 'polluter pays' principle. Also, former power station and coal mine employees should receive preference for employment for this work. Most of all it should be a planned transition to minimise disruption.

Conclusion

Coal fired power stations are now a bit of an anachronism. We now know better ways to make electricity which are cleaner, healthier, less polluting and less harmful to the prospects of a safe climate for future generations.

A planned transition should start soon because action is needed urgently and because we have excess generating capacity.

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