



Media release

29 October 2012

New coal and health report welcomed

The national coalition of health groups, the Climate and Health Alliance, has welcomed a new report from Sydney University highlighting the risks to health for people living and working in communities near coal mines and coal fired power stations.

CAHA Convenor Fiona Armstrong said the *Health and Social Harms of Coal: Spotlight on the Hunter* report was an important contribution to understanding the implications of energy and resources policy on human health.

“This report serves to highlight the risks to the health of communities living in proximity to coal mining and processing and coal fired power stations. Coal is harmful to human health at every stage of the production cycle, with people exposed to pollution and dust from coal mining at risk of developing serious diseases affecting their hearts, lungs, kidneys and nervous systems; while the pollution from burning coal to produce electricity poses cancer, respiratory and cardiovascular disease risks, and affects children’s intellectual development.”

There has been a failure to carefully monitor the health and wellbeing of people in coal communities, Ms Armstrong said.

“The huge expansion of the coal industry in Australia is occurring without due regard for the health and wellbeing of the community. Successive governments have failed to take account of the risks to the health of people from coal mining and production – there must be a substantial improvement in monitoring of all potential risk factors and careful health impact assessments conducted of all coal mining and combustion activity in Australia.”

The report concurs with much international evidence that the financial costs from health and social harm associated with coal mining and production may well outweigh any benefits associated with the economic activity created.

“Recent research suggests that the coal industry may be costing national economies more than it returns.^{1,2} When the perverse incentives for coal and the health and environmental costs of harm are accounted for, it appears coal creates an economic burden rather than a benefit,” Ms Armstrong said.

“This report provides an opportunity for the Australian community to begin to consider whether this industry is in the national interest, given the health, social and environmental harm associated with coal. The evidence suggests it is not, and it is time for these fundamental considerations of health, wellbeing and protection of the biosphere to be recognised in energy and resources policy.”

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¹ Epstein, P. Full cost accounting for the life cycle of coal, *Annals of New York Academy of Sciences*, 1219: 73-98.

² Muller, N et al. Environmental Accounting for Pollution in the United States Economy, *American Economic Review*, August 2011, 101, pp.1649–1675