

Proposal gone to the PAC

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MEMBER for Burrinjuck Katrina Hodgkinson has criticised the NSW Department of Planning for recommending approval for AGL's proposed \$1.5billion Dalton Gas Fired Power Station.

In an address to the NSW Planning Assessment Commission (PAC) – who will make the final decision on whether or not the development will go ahead – Ms Hodgkinson said the conditions of consent were not stringent enough.

She said serious question marks still loomed and if approval was granted unamended it would be an example of the department getting it wrong “again”.

When the PAC held a public consultation meeting in Gunning on Thursday, Minister Hodgkinson told representatives she had done an immense amount of research into the state's existing gas fired power stations and that the results were not glowing.

“The information I have obtained leads me to the conclusion if this project is approved in its current form there will be little, if any, protection for the community if it eventuates that the Department of Planning and Infrastructure has got it wrong, again,” she said.

“The reality of life is that once this project is constructed it will be used. It is very important that the PAC make the right decision for the right reasons. If you approve this proposal then it is incumbent on you to make sure the development consent conditions will not have a severe adverse effect on the local community.”

There are five gas turbine power stations in the state and the most comparable to AGL's, Uranquinty Gas Fired Power Station, has never been able to meet the noise restrictions set by the State Government, despite what the company said during the application process.

According to Minister Hodgkinson, the proponents, Origin Energy, reportedly paid millions of dollars in litigation to the plant's neighbours and forced up to 10 families to leave their properties.

“The only major difference between Uranquinty and Dalton is that the township of Uranquinty is located 2.4km from the power station whilst the centre of the village of Dalton is 4km removed from the proposed site,” she said.

“I note there will be some additional attenuation of noise due to the increased distance, but this will vary significantly with different atmospheric conditions.

“The Director-General's MPA for Dalton, page 23, states: ‘A number of submissions cited the example of the Uranquinty power station where the actual operating noise is well above predicted noise levels and expressed concern that the same situation could arise with the Dalton Power Project’. ‘Having acknowledged these concerns, the Department of Planning makes no further mention of Uranquinty in the rest of the 73 page document. This concerns me.

“The Department of Planning recommended the approval of Uranquinty stating that it would meet the requirements of the New South Wales Industrial Noise Policy. It is obvious they got it wrong then.

“The Department of Planning is making the same statement here, and even though they note the Uranquinty experience, the omission of any further mention of Uranquinty from the MPA rings serious alarm bells.

“People who choose to live in a country area do so in the knowledge that their lifestyle is a trade-off between positive and negative factors. Mobile phone reception is pretty crook, sometimes they don't have a dependable water supply - as everybody in Gunning and Dalton knows, the roads are not as good as those in the city, power failures are more frequent, and you have further to travel to get to the doctor, shops and hospitals.

“Yet we all love living in a rural setting because of the sense of community, the relaxed attitude, fresh air and peace and quiet. A large part of this is the ability to be outside and still experience fresh air and peace and quiet...”

“I am concerned at the possibility that this project has the potential to affect the character of this local community. I am even more concerned that the Department of Planning appears not to consider this possibility to be very important.

“I would ask that you give this factor significant consideration when you are considering this proposal.”

Minister Hodgkinson also pointed out that Delta Electricity’s Colongra Power Station also hadn’t met its requirements. She said the consequences were not severe enough and wanted to see a commitment that the plant would be shut down immediately if it failed to comply with any of the restrictions placed upon it.

“The AGL project is an investment of approximately \$1.5b in infrastructure within NSW,” Minister Hodgkinson said.

“Once this money is spent, no reasonable person would expect this infrastructure would lie idle if, like Uranquinty, it were not able to meet the consent conditions. Based on the question mark hanging over the need for additional power generation capability in the future; the omission of any reassurance from the Department of Planning about a repeat of the Uranquinty situation; and the failings of AGL’s public consultation it is my personal view that this project should not be approved.”

Read the story at the following link: <http://www.goulburnpost.com.au/story/130129/proposal-gone-to-the-pac/>