

16/11/2009

The Honourable Minister for Environment
Mr Peter Garrett
Parliament House
ACT

A statement re the Boral bitumen plant together with the port of Hastings expansion and its potential impact on Westernport bay and its catchment.

Dear Minister Garrett,

You may recall a letter I sent to you last year stating our concerns regarding the Boral bitumen facility, the port expansion and its potential adverse impact on the ecological sensitivities of Westernport bay and its environs. I have enclosed a copy to assist and expedite a clear understanding of developments.

To bring you up to date: Justin Madden our state planning minister gave Boral approval for a bitumen storage facility at Crib Point; A decision that has painfully offended 97% of the people from Crib Point, Bittern and Hastings. Unforgiveable is the manner in which Justin Madden totally rejected the reasonable concerns of the people, disregarded the planning requirements of the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council and ignored the findings of a committee of inquiry. A committee of enquiry that Minister Madden, himself, had established after withdrawing the matter from VCAT: Please note 'a committee of enquiry that rejected the bitumen facility on all counts'.

Supported accurate details of this rogue minister's extraordinary and shameless decision can be provided by Neale Burgess, State opposition shadow minister and Rosemary Evans, Secretary Crib Point Advisory Committee.

Shortly after the decision to approve the bitumen facility the Age newspaper (October 14 2009), front page, stated that a proposed brown coal facility would pipe brown coal slurry from the La Trobe valley to Crib Point for shipping to India. The proposal included fertilizer to be exported also.

At a recent port's related meeting, attended by Ralph Kenyan, Port of Hastings CEO;

I was dismayed to discover the staggering figures of potential increased shipping in Westernport: A minimum of four ships p/a transporting bitumen, possibly two hundred ships p/a transporting brown coal. Proposed shipping for fertiliser export unknown. This together with the existing shipping of steel, oil and by products, add this to the long term proposal of motor vehicle and wood chip import/export guarantees the death of this Ramsar site.

All ships exude oil from their bearings plus the covert disposal overboard of sludge and trash. Mountains of rubbish build up on our distant beaches, small islands of rubbish form in the ocean several kilometres wide. Self polishing paint comes off the ships out in the ocean at full speed. I was so upset I phoned Ralph Kenyan the next day to examine all other possible scenarios. He at least gave me his time but without any positive result re protection of Westernport.

Dr Brian Cuming, greatly respected environmentalist and staunch adversary to any industrial development detrimental to Westernport's natural biodiversity, has, for forty years ongoing maintained that Westernport's sensitive ecology cannot sustain industrial port activity. Of major concern, the highly destructive nature of oil now well documented in Dr Rikki Ott's book "Not One Drop, an account of the (continuing) aftermath of the Exxon Valdez oil spill tragedy. As for the bleak long term environmental devastation of the WA oil spill, considered amongst the world's worst; the tragic scope and result of which may never be known to our retired age group, myself included.

Westernport is not a large bay like Port Phillip Bay. It is not a bay more a small and narrow tidal inlet with breathing mudflats sensitive to change as research has shown.

Westernport is the food bowl for Phillip Island's fairy penguins potentially a billion dollar industry for Australia's tourism. It is Victoria's top tourist attraction. Their existence depends on the health of Westernport's mangroves, seagrass and micro marine life/food chain.

Further, its coast and hinter land home to a broad and diverse range of native flora and fauna, including the southern brown bandicoot. All will be put at risk if the bitumen facility and port expansion are approved.

We ask that you consider our concerns and their historic urgency. We ask that you disallow Boral's bitumen storage facility and put on hold the proposed Port of Hastings expansion at least until a full and independent EES is conducted.

Regards

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