

Letter Writing Guide

Lake Macquarie coal-ash waste & heavy metal contamination

Writing a letter to the appropriate government representatives is an effective way to push for right action to be taken on an issue.

Oftentimes, ministers are not aware of the the urgency or details of local issues, so taking the time to write a personal letter is both a source of information and an indicator the degree of concern among communities.

This guide covers the key points, key people, quick tips for letter writers, a suggested format and reference material for writing letters about the coal-ash waste dumps on Lake Macquarie.

KEY POINTS

Heavy metal pollution

- It is estimated that 620kgs of heavy metals toxic to the lakes ecosystem escape into the Lake per year.
- The Environment Protect Licence (EPL:761) for Vales Point is failing to reduce heavy metals being emitted into the Lake, and sets *no heavy metals concentration limits* at any of its water monitoring points.
- The Environment Protect Licence (EPL: 1429) for Eraring is failing to reduce heavy metals being emitted into the Lake, and only sets limits for copper (5 ppb), iron (300ppb), selenium (2ppb) and temperature, but emits aluminium, arsenic cadmium, chromium, copper, iron, lead, manganese, nickel, selenium, vanadium, and zinc.
- High concentrations of heavy metals impact the reproduction of aquatic species, which will see the ecosystem in the lake continue to degrade.

Coal-ash dumps

- In the Lake Macquarie and Central Coast region, there is a combined 61 million tonnes of coal-ash waste
- Both the coal-ash waste dumps on the shores of Lake Macquarie are unlined, enabling leaching into groundwater
- Concentrations of heavy metals in groundwater at both power stations are in exceedence of ANZECC (2000) water quality guidelines
- In 2016, coal-ash accounted for 20 percent of all the waste produced in Australia
- There are underground mine workings present (Awaba mine) and concerns about the structural integrity of Origin Energy ash dump
- The re-use rates of coal-ash waste produced at the Vales Point and Eraing facilities are incredibly low, 17% and 30% respectively. Japan has achieved a 97% re-use rate.

Regulatory issues and recommendations

- Power stations operators should be made to hold a bond or insurance for the full costs of clean-up and be held accountable to rehabilitate ash dump sites
- The NSW EPA should investigate coal ash generated in NSW and introduce the appropriate classification and licensing.
- Financial incentives, such as fees and levies should be paid by operators for dumping this toxic waste into unlined dumps.
- The EPL (1429: Eraring and 761: Vales Point) should be updated to reflect all the heavy metal pollutants being emitted into Lake Macquarie.
- Background and additional monitoring, and an independent monitoring scheme for heavy metal emissions should be established and funded by operators or local/state government
- The NSW Government should launch an investigation into possible safe management of coal ash waste, and seek to support new on-site industries which could facilitate safe re-use of coal-ash in the cement industry

Source

[Out of the Ashes: Water pollution and Lake Macquarie's aging coal-fired power stations](#)

Hunter Community Environment Centre

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KEY REPRESENTATIVES

State Minister

It's important that the appropriate NSW Minister is informed of the issue and your concerns.

New South Wales Minister for Energy and Environment

The Hon. Matt Kean MP

GPO Box 5341

SYDNEY NSW 2001

02) 8574 6150

(02) 9339 5572

Local Members

Not only should the State Minister be informed, but so too your local representatives.

**Vales Point,
Mannering Park**

Member for Swansea

Ms Yasmin Catley, MP
Shop 1
204-206 Pacific Highway
SWANSEA NSW 2281
(02) 4972 1133

**Eraring,
Myuna Bay**

Member for Lake Macquarie

Mr Greg Piper, MP
92 Victory Parade
TORONTO NSW 2283
(02) 4959 3200

NSW EPA

The NSW Environment Protection Authority is an independent statutory authority and environmental regulator.

Don't hesitate to get in touch with them about specific pollution incidents or to express your concerns about coal-ash waste dump management and heavy metal discharge from coal-fired power stations - <https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/reporting-and-incidents/report-pollution>

SOURCE MATERIAL & REFERENCES

The following material includes reports and media on pollution issues stemming from coal-fired power stations in Lake Macquarie, which you can reference and use to inform your letter.

Hunter Community Environment Centre

- [Out of the Ashes report](#)
- [Coal ash has become one of Australia's biggest waste problems — and a solution is being ignored](#), ABC Newcastle
- [Crabs in Lake Macquarie contaminated with 'unhealthy' levels of cadmium](#), ABC Newcastle
- [Dangerous levels of cadmium in Lake Macquarie marine life](#), ABC AM
- [An internal government agency report raises serious concerns about the health of Lake Macquarie](#) - Newcastle Herald
- [Crabbers easy luxury in doubt after Lake Macquarie report](#) - Newcastle Herald
- [Piper backs independent review of damning Lake Macquarie report](#) - Newcastle Herald

Environmental Justice Australia

- [Toxic and Terminal](#) report
- ['Black hole': Pollution from coal-fired power worse than overseas, survey finds](#), SMH
- [Environmental report slams Vales Point and Eraring Power Stations](#), Coast Community News
- [Unearthing Australia's toxic coal ash legacy](#) report
- [Coal ash dumps a 'ticking time bomb': Environmental Justice Australia Report](#), Newcastle Herald
- [Coal waste found to be a 'ticking time bomb' across Australia](#), Guardian
- ['Ticking time bomb' of toxic coal ash putting Australian lives at risk, new report says](#), SBS

For further related articles, see [this document](#)

QUICK TIPS FOR LETTER-WRITERS

- Introduce yourself and your connection to your local area
- Include both emotional perspectives and factual information
- Be clear about the changes or action you want to see (are you asking for an inquiry, better regulation, does the matter rest with the individual you're writing to or a department they have influence in...?)
- Take your time, don't send the first draft
- Maintain a respectful and polite tone
- Include a return address
- Encourage others to write a letter too, share your letter on social media to inform others of the issue and how to take action

TEMPLATE LETTER

TITLE
ADDRESS LINE 1
LINE 2
PHONE NUMBER

Dear _____,

Sentence #1: Introduce yourself

I am (a teacher/student/mother/engineer/recreational fisher/local resident/ former _____, etc.) writing to you from (region, suburb).

Sentence #2: Introduce the issue or topic

I am writing because I am (upset/worried/concerned/ troubled, etc.) by the heavy metal contamination issues facing Lake Macquarie, due to the large quantity of coal-ash waste stored on its shores.

Sentence #3: Explain why the issue is important, and how you want to see it addressed

(Describe the facets of the issue which particularly concern you, then state the course of action you want to see taken, see *Key Points* and *Source Material* above)

Examples

1. The recreational use of the lake is being jeopardized by the accumulating heavy metals in aquatic species, therefore I ask that you amend the licences to see concentration limits introduced and stricter enforcement of licence conditions by the EPA.
2. The safety of the lake and its ecosystem is being risked by poor ash waste management practices, therefore I ask that you ensure the operators are made to put aside funds to pay for long-term management and rehabilitation schemes for these these toxic sites.

Sentence #4: Ask for right action and to stay in touch

I request that you in your role as _____, do what you can to address this issue as outlined above, and look forward to hearing from you about what steps you have taken.

Best wishes,
(NAME)
(ORGANISATION)
(SIGNATURE)

For further information or questions, contact...

Coal-Ash Community Alliance – coalashalliance@gmail.com