

In a previous email, I outlined some of the concerns I feel must be addressed in considering the rail link. Particularly worrying is the impact this proposed rail link will have on the : 1) environment and wildlife, 2) the methods in place to minimize noise and other rail movement impact (coal dust and exhaust from trains) and 3) potential negative impacts on people living near the proposed link. Because of the short time available, I will put my concerns here, hoping that the matters will be seriously examined in view of the high risks of irreparable damage to the lands that are targeted for this proposal.

First, the issues of land clearing and destruction of wildlife habitat is of paramount importance. It is easy to dismiss the lives and homes of voiceless communities who do not have the benefit of a vote in order to register their protests about the destruction of their ecological niches. Australia's appalling record of landclearing testifies to government and industry indifference to the wildlife habitats that are being erased in Australia's haste to allow the global economic giants to rape this continent for its resources. The MaldonDombarton (henceforth MD) rail link is now being reconsidered because it is an expedient to help in the greedy quest for wealth at the expense of values (natural beauty, biodiversity, sustainable lifestyles) that would prove far more enriching for generations to come. What measures will be undertaken, if any, to ensure that damage will be either minimized or avoided altogether? I am deeply concerned that this rail link project will cost more than it saves and serves a questionable advantage to any but those who make their money from the sale of Australian resources and care little for the ruin of the countryside in their pursuit of power.

Second, as a resident living close to the rail link north of Wollongong, I am constantly aware of the noise, air pollution, and gritty coal dust that follows the trains in their route to and from the coal mines. The noise is often at a level that would be permanently damaging to human hearing, and it is always distressing to non-human creatures. What is more, the frequent noise of the work crews maintaining the lines is often even worse than the noise of the trains. My concern: how are these disturbing issues to be addressed in the construction of an additional rail link? Has anyone considered the need for noise abatement: not only on new lines, but along already existing lines? Recent DAs in this area have mentioned noise abatement measures as part of an Environmental Protection plan. Will such an issue be addressed in the MD link? Noise is damaging. Mitigation of noise must be a serious part of the plan to build a link through land that has yet to hear the blast of train horns, rumbling carriages, and roaring speeding cargo.

Third, while my greatest concern is about the non-human community that will be directly destroyed, I have serious questions about the overall impact of the link on human communities for whom the link is expected to create improvements. I am doubtful of a number of alleged advantages. In view of the two points discussed above, will the result really be reduced coal truck traffic on the roads, and / or reduced coal train movements on the existing rails? My concern is that the MD line will increase rather than decrease all of the already overloaded systems of freight transport. Again, issues of ecological, noise and pollution damage are raised. The cost of the MD link will be enormous in financial terms, but I believe it may even be more costly in environmental terms. So, in considering this proposal, the benefits must be shown to outweigh the costs, in magnitudes of extent. Otherwise, it is a dangerous, damaging and extravagant waste.

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