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Is Lake Macquarie lost to heavy metals?

TOPICS: Coal Ash Heavy Metal Pollutant Lake Macquarie



Damning coal ash statistics have come out of a report

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The Out of the Ashes II report by Hunter Community Environment Centre estimates that 302 tonnes of harmful heavy metal pollutants will leach into the lake from the region’s two active coal-ash waste dumps between now and the planned retirement of the power stations.

The report, released on October 19, says the shores of Lake Macquarie are burdened with the largest quantity of coal-ash waste in Australia, with a combined 100 million tonnes from Vales Point and Eraring power stations.

Environment Centre spokesperson, Jo Lynch, said the NSW Government had known about water pollution from coal-ash for at least seven years and the NSW Environment Protection Authority had been allowing high concentrations of harmful heavy metals to enter waterways.

“Some heavy metals are carcinogenic and linked to species decline,” she said.

“They can affect fish and bird populations through bio-accumulation and toxicological impacts, including deformities which reduce breeding success.”

Dr Ian Wright, a water quality expert and Senior Lecturer at Western Sydney University said heavy metals are insidious and stubborn pollutants and high risk for species and human health due to the tendency for bio-accumulation.

Limits on the consumption of seafood from Lake Macquarie are already in place due to the bio-accumulation of selenium in fish, and a recent government study found that cadmium in mud crab has also reached unsafe concentrations.

Results of the Environment Centre’s water sampling at drainage from the Vales Point ash dump into Lake Macquarie at Mannering Bay identified water quality exceedences of species protection and recreational use limits for aluminium,

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Coast Community News 21 hours ago

The advent of COVID-19 has seen an increase in the number of Central Coast residents working from their homes. To a survey by The Foundry Cowork Central Coast residents are working through the COVID pandemic. [through for the full story, complete interviews] #covid19 #worklife #The Foundry Cowork #telework <https://coastcommunitynews.com.au/points-to-future/>

protection and recreational use limits for aluminium, boron, cobalt, copper, iron, manganese, nickel and zinc.

The report also revealed that the NSW Government had long been aware of coal-ash contamination, summarising evidence of extensive groundwater contamination at coal-ash sites published in formerly classified Environmental Site Assessments, completed for NSW Treasury prior to the privatisation of power stations between 2013 and 2015.

“The NSW Government must act now to increase safe coal-ash re-use and get this poison out of our waterways,” Lynch said.

“The EPA must prioritise slowing the leachate of harmful pollutants into NSW waterways from these coal-ash waste dumps.”

Findings of the Out of Ashes II report are drawn from public, government and industry data, as well as field investigations completed by Hunter Community Environment Centre.

The full Out of the Ashes II report and key findings can be viewed at hcec.org.au/out-of-the-ashes-ii

An Inquiry was established in October 2019 for the NSW Public Works Committee to investigate and report on the costs of remediation of coal-ash repositories in NSW, including Vales Point and Eraring.

Two public hearings have been held already, the latest at Lake Macquarie on October 6, and a report on the Committee’s findings from the Inquiry is expected by mid-year 2021.

Sue Murray

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