

TOXIC DREDGING IN THE HUNTER RIVER

DEMAND THOROUGH ASSESSMENT

The Minister for Planning approved a massive dredging operation in the South Arm of the Hunter River – adjacent to the old BHP site – Now, BHP want the dredging to happen to make way for the third coal terminal.

The project has altered substantially since first approved, and the Minister is considering significant modifications without further public consultation.

Write a letter today calling on the Minister to come clean about the Hunter River toxic dredging, require BHP to re-assess their proposal and fulfil their remediation obligations that are a decade overdue.

Write to: Frank Sartor, Minister for Planning
Level 34, Governor Macquarie Tower
1 Farrer Pl. Sydney

Dear Minister Sartor,

I call on you not to approve changes to the dredging and remediation of toxic sediment in the South Arm of the Hunter River. The changes proposed by BHP Billiton constitute substantial modification to the project, and as such, should be subject to new development application and environmental assessment.

This is the only way to ensure that the public is kept informed about what is probably the largest remediation project of this type in Australia.

I look forward to your response in this matter.

Sincerely

[your name]

What's the detail?

1. It has been revealed that BHP will need to dredge three times the volume of contaminated sediment assumed in the original approval – from 150,000 m³ to 450,000 m³
2. In order to accommodate this unexpected increase in volume, they propose to increase the area of land covered by toxic sludge one thousand-fold. In the application for modification of consent, they write: “Restrictions to the site footprint will significantly delay this project and have a knock on effect to other proponents who wish to dredge the south arm” -- for the third coal terminal.
3. Areas of high-level of toxic contamination have been found in expected places in the River, outside the identified contamination zone, and closer to the northern bank of the river where the new coal terminal is proposed to be built.
4. BHP propose to use only a silt curtain to shield these additional contamination zones during dredging, which may allow re-suspension in the water column, stating in their application: “As the project *evolved* from the original EIS it has become clear that there are some discontinuous areas of contamination that will be subject to “surgical dredging.” While the bulk of the dredging will take place behind initially approved method of “sheet piled walls” the “surgical dredging” will occur behind silt curtains.
5. Their application also states that “It is not possible at this time to provide detail designs for the silt curtains as this will be the responsibility of the successful tenderer” – effectively asking for approval before being sure what they are going to do, or what effect it will have.
6. They are applying to remove the consent condition that requires them to keep special plastic sheeting over the contaminated sediment once it is on land awaiting treatment

How can I find out more?

Contact the Hunter Community Environment Centre
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