

Myths on Hume power station cloak benefits

This is a chance for the city to grow,
ActewAGL CEO **JOHN MACKAY** writes

The proposed Canberra Technology City data centre and natural gas-fired co-generation facility has recently received a great deal of community interest, and while we appreciate the issues raised and the support from many sectors, there have also been myths and misinformation promulgated throughout the media, and the community, which I will attempt to dispel.

As a member of the Canberra community myself, I support interest in the CTC development and I'm eager to ensure people have access to the right information so they can make informed and considered decisions. I also support the extension of the consultation period to ensure sufficient time for the community to contribute to the ACTPLA process.

I'm personally excited about the positive prospects of this development for Canberra. It will not only account for a significant contribution to the ACT's economy, but it will bring more, much needed, skilled workers to Canberra, opening up more opportunities to diversify our workforce during construction and operation. The flow-on of this investment is substantial, with the local community, businesses, tourism and housing benefiting.

These flow-on effects are particularly important, given that spending cuts are expected for next week's federal budget. The territory has, in the past, relied heavily on the Federal Government in terms of support for employment, business and infrastructure, but where will this leave us in the future?

Despite the enormous benefits I see the CTC bringing to Canberra, this doesn't make community concerns any less important. In recent weeks, issues raised by Canberra residents have included the location of the site; noise and

environmental impacts; water use; heritage; and horse yards and trails.

In terms of the proposed location for the CTC, the selection of the site is a result of strong analysis, investigation and independent assessments. Under the Territory Plan, the site is classified as broadacre and is suitable for a variety of purposes including communications facilities and major utility installations consistent with the CTC development. Therefore the site doesn't need to be rezoned, despite popular belief. Further, the gas-fired generators and their chimney stacks are 990m from the nearest residence, not 600m, as has been misrepresented by several opponents.

From a wider perspective, I believe, and a number of years of evaluation has shown, that Canberra is an ideal location for the CTC as the city is home to an advanced fibre-optic cable network with access to major telecommunications trunks.

Strict noise-pollution standards will be met, limiting noise to targets required of developments in residential areas. The simple fact is that noise emitting from the site will remain under the allowable noise limits specified in the Environmental Protection Regulation.

An independent study on air emissions and pollution has been undertaken. Natural gas is cleaner than other sources of fossil fuel power generation, and the consortium will ensure that emissions do not exceed the levels specified for the area. The use of new co-generation technology will see low emissions from the facility because of the very efficient use of energy, such as the use of exhaust energy for absorption cooling.

The onsite co-generation facility will provide energy needs to the CTC and eliminate the energy losses associated with the transmission

and distribution of electricity over the grid. Surplus energy generated by the facility may be sold back to the electricity grid.

The CTC design will also take advantage of Canberra's cool climate which will provide free air cooling and energy efficiency gains of up to 10 per cent. Energy efficient lighting will also be used and rainwater will be harvested and used for landscape and gardens. Water is used as part of the cooling and steam-turbine condensation system, but is only expected to consume a total of less than 600 megalitres of water per year.

The consortium has taken into account the needs of horse owners and riders in the community. The site boundary has been moved to provide a horse trail along the front of Mugga Lane and at the southern end of the site, with connections to existing trails.

The consortium has confidence in the ACTPLA process for assessing the CTC development application to ensure it meets all of the requirements of the Territory Plan. We are strongly committed to this project proceeding on this site. I can guarantee, however, that we will do "whatever it takes" to make sure that it is not noisy; that it does not pollute the environment; that it is not an eyesore; and that people have a reasonable chance to learn more about it and express their views.

■ ActewAGL will be holding a community information day about the power station on Saturday, May 17 from 10am to 3pm at the Town Centre Sports Club (Vikings Club), corner Rowland Rees Crescent and Athillon Drive, Greenway.

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