

## Move battle away from the coalface

WHEN you consider the many challenges facing humanity right now, nothing comes close to the warming of our planet caused primarily by human activity. Specifically, the increase in carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere, according to the world's scientists, presents the international community with an ultimatum - either take drastic and immediate action to curb carbon dioxide emission levels or suffer massive and unthinkable social and economic consequences.

Against this backdrop, one would expect the consideration of a range of options to reduce emission levels and debate about their effectiveness and viability. This is a good thing and a debate we need to have.

One view that seems to attract a broad consensus is that no one measure will achieve the desired outcome; we need a combination of strategies. This includes the development and application of viable, renewable and greenhouse-friendly energy and power generation technologies. It also includes improving the efficiency and reducing the level of our energy consumption.

When it comes to the crunch, however, the burning questions revolve around coal-fired power generation and fossil fuels as major contributors to greenhouse gas emissions. Here, we need to acknowledge that coal-fired power generation using existing technology is not sustainable into the future.

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Some have argued significant emission reduction is not possible and that clean coal technologies are a delaying tactic used by industry to prevent real action on climate change.

If this is the case, and if that section of the coal industry is not able to meet emission reduction targets, they may well be phased out. The point is that we should focus on carbon dioxide gas emissions, not coal itself, which is not inherently harmful to life on this planet. It also means that the multinational energy giants who continue to make billions of dollars from coalmining have to take responsibility for reinvesting more in sustainable coal technologies or face the prospect of extinction.

On the face of it, that's a tough call for the Illawarra, where our economy is highly dependent, directly and indirectly, on the coal industry and where unemployment doubles the national average.

What many people may not realise, however, is that most of the coal mined on the South Coast is headed for steel production and related uses, not power generation. In other words, phasing out coalmining in the Illawarra will not result in a significant reduction in greenhouse gasses unless the Port Kembla steelworks and others around the world are phased out as well.

Even then, the greenhouse emissions in the steel industry as a whole are a fraction of the output from coal used in the power industry.

The use of accurate information is vital if we are to win the campaign against the vested interests that are bankrolling scepticism of climate change and trying to evade their responsibilities to clean up their act. We should resist the temptation of simplifying the solution to a complex problem.

Ultimately, our success will depend not only on generating the broadest possible international movement for change, but ensuring that the changes are actually implemented as well.