

Rising Tide wouldn't stop a cruise ship, so what's the real story?

By Zack Schofield
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Rising Tide has repeatedly made it clear that non-coal vessels will be allowed to pass through any blockade we conduct on Newcastle Harbour. We are fighting for a fairer Hunter with a more diverse economy - why would we want to disrupt non-coal shipping?

Yet the [Silver Nova](#) cruise ship has said it will cancel a planned visit to the city in November, prompting a wave of condemnations against us from the Port of Newcastle, the former Tourism Hunter chairman, and the state government.

Rising Tide would have welcomed the cruise ship with fanfare - so if we're not stopping the Silver Nova (nor are we stopping grain exports), then what's really going on?

United Church Minister Alan Stuart was among the 109 people arrested at a three-day climate protest in Newcastle.

The coal industry and their government supporters are lashing out - because we're making an uncomfortable demand.

For over a year, Rising Tide has been strongly advocating for a 75 per cent profits tax on currently lucrative coal exports, which in 2023 accounted for 94 per cent of total trade through the Port of Newcastle - which is far less diversified than Port of Newcastle CEO Craig Carmody would like you to believe.

Proceeds from the tax would help prepare the Hunter for declining coal exports by funding investment in new industries, and training and support for affected workers.

Currently, the income that NSW receives from coal resources averages about 12 per cent - far lower than what everyday Australians pay on their modest incomes. And of the taxes paid in the Hunter, we receive a measly 2 per cent back in community investment. Not only do they pay us so little - in 2023-24, the federal government gave the coal and gas industries \$14 billion in taxpayer dollars - far more than they ever pay in tax.

To my mind, that well and truly makes them bludgers.

Further, we agree with Mr Carmody's recent comments, published in the *Newcastle Herald*, that the coal export industry could collapse within the next decade. This is supported by the International Energy Agency, which recently predicted that global coal demand will "reach a turning point and start declining soon".

You don't need to believe in anthropogenic climate change to understand that our major coal export customers - China, Japan, and Korea - are rapidly transitioning to renewable energy, because they'd rather produce cheap power in their backyards than buy it from us.

I remember being in a room with Tim Buckley, from Climate Energy Finance, who was telling Hunter community members that in 2023 alone, China built six times as much in solar energy generation capacity than Australia has ever built in history - including coal, gas, hydro, solar, and wind.

If we do not fully fund a transition, Australian workers will be left behind on the scrap heap by corporations who are hoping to milk the coal industry to its last drop, and pay as little tax as possible back to the communities that make their profits.

Rising Tide says no.

We are expecting to welcome about half of our anticipated 10,000 participants from outside Newcastle to our family-friendly Protestival - all of whom understand that the future of the Hunter region is critical for all Australians. If we let this rort go for much longer, we will have missed our opportunity to make sure the coal industry works for all Australians, not just corporate investors.

As well as being a powerful act of advocacy for the future of our region, participants in the 13th People's Blockade will also enjoy internationally-renowned musical acts including [singer-songwriter John Butler](#), and enjoy the hospitality of our great seaside city - contributing substantially to the tourist and hospitality economies.

Instead of demonising community members simply fighting for a fair go, we invite Mr Carmody to attend the blockade, so that he can experience what is rapidly becoming an important cultural institution in our region.

So then: what is really going on with this wave of condemnation as the Silver Nova turns away from Newcastle? It's much easier for politicians and business leaders to pick on everyday punters than it is to question the coal industry. But with a transition looming - whether we like it or not - what is fair for these bludgers to pay? We say much, much more.

<https://www.newcastleherald.com.au/story/8752919/rising-tide-challenges-coal-blockade-misconceptions/>