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Big Coal: Australia's Dirtiest Habit



Synopsis

Australia's dirtiest habit is its addiction to coal. But is our dependence on it a road to prosperity or a dead end? Are we hooked for life? And who is profiting from our addiction? Former lobbyist and political insider Guy Pearse, media and politics commentator David McKnight and environment writer Bob Burton cut through the spin to expose the underbelly of an industry whose power continues to soar while its expansion feeds catastrophic climate change. They dissect the charm offensive (and muscle) the coal industry uses to get its way, and reveal the myth of clean coal and the taxpayer-funded PR machine behind it. They chart the stratospheric rise of a new generation of coal barons (some high-profile, others faceless). And they lay bare the desolation in regional communities as prime farming land and much else is strip-mined along with the coal. Most contentiously of all, they explore how Australia can break its dirtiest habit and move towards a prosperous, sustainable-energy future.

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Customer Reviews

The book provides an excellent historical overview of coal in Australia, well researched and informative. My only criticism is where the book diverts to energy policy. For example, the authors adopt a sensibly cautious view on the scaling, economic, and practical challenges of carbon capture, but seem to naively accept the exaggerated claims for renewable energy by the various environmental groups referenced in the book. I have similarly expressed reservations on the role of “clean coal”, but nonetheless it still remains a live option to policy makers even if it doesn’t capture the public’s imagination the way that solar farms do. Similarly, wind and solar may provide a useful abatement role, but for various technical and market reasons, these have been unable to meaningfully alter coal’s trajectory - Germany provides an excellent case study of coal’s longevity - in the end, affordable and reliable power will always take precedence over abstract ideals. Putting this weakness aside, the book would make a excellent addition to the library for people interested in Australia’s coal history.

These guys have put a surprising amount of research into this book. They have given the main players (coal barons) a fair and balanced analysis and I have (slightly) altered my view of these people. However, I am still hoping that it won’t be too long before our ‘dirtiest habit’ disappears forever. Let the farmers get back to what they do best and our fertile lands continue to produce food for our country and the world. It never ceases to amaze me how greedy some people are! If they have ‘more money than you could ever dream of’ (to quote Clive Palmer), surely it is time to relax, sit back and enjoy what they have. But as this book says, very few of them ever do this. I sincerely hope that in the near future, Australia can also say that ‘Big Coal is a dead man walking’.

This is a treatise on the who’s who of the Australian coal industry and how they have skilfully made themselves indispensable to various communities throughout Australia. The book does not spare the political parties who have allowed themselves to be wooed by the coal industry offerings, and the ethical compromises that are made, while avoiding direct corruption. It seems the coal industry has reached into all parts of both state and federal governments, and into our lives. Trying to wean ourselves from the coal industry teat to a cleaner energy will be very difficult.

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