



## **ACADEMIC WHO SPARKED UNI OF NEWCASTLE CHANCELLOR-ELECT'S OUSTER SPEAKS OUT**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

THE academic whose resignation from the Council of the University of Newcastle Council over the appointment of a coal executive as Chancellor, sparking protests leading to his withdrawal from the position, has spoken out.

Professor Jennifer Martin, the Chair of Clinical Pharmacology at the University, was a staff representative on the Council until the appointment of Mark Vaile, former Leader of the National Party and Deputy Prime Minister, and current Chairman of Whitehaven Coal, was made official on 7 June 2021.

In today's edition of *InSight+*, the online news magazine of the *Medical Journal of Australia*, Professor Martin and Richard Denniss, Chief Economist at the Australia Institute, say the uproar over Mr Vaile's appointment "should have come as no surprise to the Council".

"Newcastle is a proud regional city rapidly transitioning and preparing for a post-coal future," Professor Martin and Mr Dennis wrote.

"Many in the community are concerned not just about the health effects but also the subsequent economic consequences of climate change, particularly those who may lose their jobs and livelihoods in the energy transition, as well as Indigenous people whose lands are often involved in fossil fuel mines.

"While people around the world are focused on how to rapidly reduce fossil fuel use, concern about how the Hunter will cope with the world's transition away from coal is a more local concern.

"It should have come as no surprise to the Council of the University of Newcastle that their staff, students and the broader community would be deeply concerned by the decision to appoint as Chancellor a person who chairs a coal company that remains determined to build new coal mines," they wrote.

Professor Martin's resignation was followed by a threatened boycott by 16 philanthropists who are substantial donors to the University, as well as other groups.

"Resistance to the proposed appointment grew exponentially and from many quarters," Martin and Denniss wrote.

"Initially, the concern was expressed by staff and students. This University receives significant funding for research and academic staff salaries, so there had been increasing concerns as to how the University would stay solvent as coal support to the University dwindles and remain credible in the eyes of young students looking for a university in which to study.



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"As scrutiny increased in relation to the University's appointment, so concerns about the effect of coal on health also increased and various groups, including senior doctors, junior doctors, Doctors for the Environment Australia, anti-coal groups, climate change groups, business renewal groups, and unions mounted independent and coalescing protests."

Mr Vaile withdrew from the position on Monday 21 June, citing an "unjustified campaign against the appointment led by minority groups placing ideology before proper governance and what is in the best interests of the university and the communities it serves".

The full *InSight+* article is free to access and is available at:

<https://insightplus.mja.com.au/2021/23/crisis-at-university-of-newcastle-leadership-symbolism-matters/>

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