



NARRABRI GAS PROJECT HEARING WILL BE EXTENDED TO SEVEN DAYS AFTER OVERWHELMING PUBLIC RESPONSE

15 July 2020

The state's Independent Planning Commission will hear from a record number of interested stakeholders when it conducts an electronic Public Hearing into the contentious Narrabri Gas Project next week.

The virtual event will allow those for and against the \$3.6 billion coal seam gas project to present their views to Commissioners Steve O'Connor (Panel Chair), John Hann and Professor Snow Barlow prior to them making a final decision.

Four hundred and four people (404) have registered to speak at the hearing, which will be extended from five to seven days to ensure everyone gets to have their say. The electronic Public Hearing will be held from Monday 20 July to Saturday 25 July, and on Saturday 1 August commencing at 9.30am AEST daily.

It will be hosted from a broadcast studio in Sydney with stakeholders presenting to the Panel via telephone or Zoom video-link. Commissioner Barlow will join proceedings via video conference from Victoria.

In direct response to concerns about some affected residents having limited or no internet or telephone access, the Commission will set up a studio at the Crossing Theatre in Narrabri where local residents and business owners from across the region can present to the Panel via video link.

This virtual form of face-to-face public participation has been used successfully by the Commission in two previous cases: the Vickery Extension Project near Boggabri, and the Brandy Hill Quarry Expansion Project in the Port Stephens LGA.

The NSW Government introduced a regulation in April this year requiring all planning bodies to conduct their public meetings and hearings electronically in response to COVID-19 (Coronavirus).

"Ideally, the Commission would be able to hold a conventional face-to-face public hearing but this has to be different in the current public health environment. There's still significant community concern, given recent developments in Victoria and other parts of NSW, about Coronavirus and the health risks associated with any large public event, particularly in a small regional community," Sam McLean, Executive Director of the Office of the Independent Planning Commission said.

"The Commission's main priority in complying with the regulation introduced by Government was to safely ensure broad public participation in its decision-making process.

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“We have been impressed by the response from not only the local community wanting to engage in the electronic Public Hearing process but also from those in other parts of NSW and Australia who might not otherwise have had the opportunity to have their say on this state significant development but for the electronic format.

“The response has been so strong that the Panel will extend the Public Hearing to seven days to ensure all 404 people who registered to have their say get the opportunity to do so,” she said.

Last week, Commissioners O’Connor, Hann and Barlow were joined by Santos representatives and independent observers from local community groups during a site inspection for the Narrabri Gas Project. They visited the Pilliga State Forest and surrounding areas.

The Panel also met with Narrabri Shire Council while on the ground in the state’s northeast.