

A Submission Objecting to the Narrabri Gas Project

I speak as a former resident teacher in Narrabri. (1977 to 2000).

During that time, my family and I were fully engaged in the social, cultural and sporting life of that community. In addition we were constant visitors and appreciators of the surrounding natural environment, including the Pilliga.

After transferring from the district in 2000, I was saddened to hear of ill-feelings and divisiveness emerging amongst the usually cohesive townspeople. Debate over the prospect of coal-seam gas drilling in the district became heated and long-standing friendships were broken. According to several residents that we continue to communicate with, an air of acrimony has tainted the spirit of a once warm and friendly community.

The following are some of the reasons that I think should lead to the decision to dismantle the Narrabri Gas Project.

Water.

Farmers who draw water from the Great Artesian Basin are particularly alarmed at the prospect that CSG extraction could detrimentally impact groundwater. There are too many questions remaining as to the affects of drilling into coal seam layers, the resultant lowering of groundwater pressure, and the probable movement of water between aquifers.

The Great Artesian Basin provides the only source of fresh water through much of inland Australia. It should not be interfered with.

Waste.

Water, brought to the surface with the gas, brings with it salt, mixed with heavy metals, plus drill cuttings. Thousands of tonnes of this waste material has to be disposed of, somewhere safe for the environment. Has Santos come up with a solution to this problem? I'm sure the local Council doesn't want to have to help with this giant headache.

Employment.

Like many mining operations throughout Australia, the numbers of workers expected to be employed is always exaggerated. If fly-in-fly-out workers are to be engaged, the local community will gain little from their presence. After the construction phase, a smaller permanent work force would compete for local housing and probably draw workers away from local trades.

The Gas Market.

If the Narrabri Field came into production, gas would likely be distributed to the eastern state through a new pipeline. Santos has indicated that this gas will be sold at the existing market price. That means users will join with other Australians who are paying the highest gas prices in the world, even though we are its biggest producer. It would also add to Australia's gas glut. There are plentiful supplies in Queensland and Western Australia. The Federal Government does not appear to want to compel gas companies to reserve gas at a reasonable cost, for local Australian consumers.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions.

As a detrimental climate change bears down on Earth, it is imperative that each nation does whatever it can to reduce the release of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

It has been calculated that this Narrabri gas project could emit as much as 5 million tonnes of CO₂ per year. Add to this the leaking methane and other venting gasses and we achieve nothing in our quest for eradicating greenhouse gas emissions. Australia's prosperity depends on this happening in the short term. In our homes, businesses and factories we will need to replace appliances for heating and cooling with those that run on clean energy - not gas.

Taxes.

On past experience, the Australian Government purse (ie all citizenry) does not benefit greatly from the extraction of this nation's resources.

Loopholes and special rates for oil and gas companies have meant tax revenue shortfalls - as low as 6% on profits in the recent past. Last year Santos Ltd paid zero corporate tax! Australian taxpayer dollars are subsidising fossil fuel industries. Subsidies provided to these companies, are the equivalent of subsidising dangerous climate change.

Investors.

Is this project a wise investment for Santos Ltd?

The company is no doubt out of pocket in the initial stages of infrastructure building, but government subsidies and tax loopholes would be making this less onerous. If allowed to get to production stage the company would likely pull in handsome profits from selling an over-priced product. However, Santos is likely to become a stranded investment in the near future when Australia and the world's nations get really serious about their CO₂ reduction targets. Renewables by then will have undercut gas as an energy source.

Conclusion.

The Narrabri Gas Project should be terminated this year and all prior work undertaken by Santos remediated.

Santos Ltd probably envisages eventual profits from the sale of gas in the domestic market, or even for overseas countries.

While doing this to boost the company's coffers, it contributes very little to this nation as it exploits a resource that's best left untouched.

Farmers fear their water will deplete, gas consumers will pay too much, the locals will remain divided and Australia will have slid backwards in our quest to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Citizens like myself will never be able to explore the wonderful natural surroundings of the Pilliga again, knowing that it had become industrialised.

What a backward step!