To: The Independent Planning Commission 4 July 2020

**OBJECTION TO THE NARRABRI COAL SEAM GAS PROJECT (SANTOS)**

Oh, where to start? Commissioning new Coal Seam Gas projects is wrong in every department.

And what happened to the Moratorium on COAL SEAM GAS Extraction in NSW?

This industry is uninsurable, leaving local landholders with the risk, when things go wrong.

If the State Government won’t put in the work to regulate it properly (in line with the Chief Scientist’s recommendations), no further projects should be approved.

Australia is in such a perfect position climactically to switch to Renewable Energy Industries and yet companies like Santos keep on pushing CLIMATE UNFRIENDLY projects like this one. Why don’t they transition their business model to industries which have a future, instead of digging up a very poisonous past.

I am aware that Santos have a toe in the use of renewable energy (solar and battery power) to power some of their oil wells in Queensland but it took SOMEONE ELSE TO PAY FOR IT! Indicative of an attitude, wouldn’t you say?

*In an Australia-first trial, oil and gas company Santos will begin converting the pumps on their oil wells to solar and battery power, thanks to $4.2m in funding from the Australian Renewable Energy Agency.* (Queensland Country Life: 19 Dec 2018)

**Water and Aquifers**

**Water, Water, Everywhere – but not a drop to drink! Unless you like your water flavoured with heavy metals and flammable!**

UNACCEPTABLE RISK OF PERMANENTLY CONTAMINATED WATER:

* From the poisonous, cancer-causing, contaminated cocktail of chemicals Santos will use to frack the coal seams to extract the gas.

UNACCEPTABLE IMPACTS FROM REMOVAL OF WATER:

Removal of 37.5 million litres of water from the aquifer(s) below the Pillaga over the twenty-year life of this project will have damaging effects and UNRECTIFIABLE CONSEQUENCES far beyond the 20 years of operation.

* It will cause Structural Damage and Depressurisation in the Pillaga Sandstone, part of the main recharge for the Great Artesian Basin – UNRECTIFIABLE – water loss which will adversely impact landholders farming in the area.
* It would create a massive spoil heap of 840,000 tonnes of solid salt, contaminated with heavy metals – for which Santos has NO DISPOSAL PLAN. Wherever they dump it, it contaminates that land forever, not for a week or a year, PERMANENTLY – UNRECTIFIABLE;
* SANTOS themselves DO NOT KNOW the structure of the aquifers that they plan to dewater: their water modelling is basic. What if they get this dreadfully wrong? Another tract of productive land, another regional community is unviable – UNRECTIFIABLE;
* Santos claims there is no linkage between the water sources they will drain – BUT they don’t really know the courses of the aquifers! They know there will be leakage from alluvium levels above the coal seams, leading to loss of alluvial soil which actually serves a purpose. Alluvium contributes to water purification by trapping sediments and contaminants. Santos themselves have NO CLEAR PICTURE of the effects of dewatering these aquifers – UNRECTIFIABLE;
* Local landholders OPPOSE this project because they know they will lose their water.

**Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Emissions**

Didn’t Australia sign up to REDUCE Greenhouse Emissions?

* INCREASES OUR GREENHOUSE EMISSIONS – BAD! – Australia signed up to the Paris Agreement to reduce our greenhouse emissions: how does this project assist in achieving any reduction? It doesn’t: This one gasfield would increase our emissions by almost 1% a year;
* ENSURES COMMITMENT TO CONTINUED GAS PRODUCTION – BAD! – the UN Environment Program’s Production Gap Report 2019 said “the time to wind down gas production is, as with other fossil fuels, already upon us”, if we are to avoid breaking the 2 degree warming barrier. Looks like Santos and Australia have no intention to keep to the Paris Agreement – and yet Australia is already suffering longer hotter summer temperatures, uncontainable bushfires for months longer than usual, recurrent and longer droughts… which are the effects of Climate Warming. We are one of the countries which will suffer most of we don’t change our ways.

**Aboriginal Heritage**

We have already seen the lip service paid – or blatantly ignored – by Rio Tinto and BHP and other mining companies, which has resulted in total destruction of ancient Aboriginal heritage sites. This is UNACCEPTABLE. These sites have been part of Aboriginal culture for tens of thousands of years, many, many generations. These mining projects last for 20, 30, 40 years, less than one average human lifetime.

The Pillaga contains highly significant cultural heritage sites for the Gomeroi people – Santos has identified at least 90 that they know about BUT these are based on old surveys. New surveys have not been undertaken. New surveys should be taken BEFORE any approval process can proceed – otherwise they may disregard them anyway and blow them up, as did Rio Tinto, knowing full well the 46,000 year old Juukan Caves were of immense heritage value.

**Wildlife and Biodiversity**

Hey! Wasn’t the Pillaga set aside for Environmental Conservation in 2005 by the NSW Government? Why are we even having this conversation about CSG projects in this area?

The Pilliga Scrub is over 5000 square kilometres of semi-arid woodland – the largest continuous remnant in NSW. That means the ONLY remaining remnant of this size! It has many threatened plant species as well as endangered birds(swift parrots, regent honeyeaters, bush stone-curlews) and warm furry animals called koalas, squirrel gliders, bettongs and Pilliga mice. Koalas are listed as Vulnerable and, after last summer’s appalling bushfires, may be extinct in the wild within 30 years if we don’t take some care of their habitat. They are part of an ecosystem. They bring tourists. Remember those?

Australia has one of the worst records of native species extinctions in the world. If we continue to destroy or industrialise our natural woodlands and habitat, what hope is there for any Australian species to survive? That could include Homo Sapiens if we don’t stabilise Climate Change.

**Impacts on Local Community**

Do people like living in Coal Seam Gas communities? NO, they don’t.

* Division of community - CSG projects in Queensland have divided communities, neighbour against neighbour, according to the CSIRO survey in 2014. Some believe they will benefit from jobs because of it, some know they’ll lose their agricultural jobs because of it, some just don’t want to live in a dirty, industrialised area which previously was agricultural;
* Rents go up - Santos admits the Narrabri project will affect rental housing affordability in the area, impacting low-income households and indigenous people who are most likely to rent. Outside workers will be brought in with special expertise and need accommodation, have better salaries than the locals, and up go the rents;
* Destruction of beauty spots – natural bushland and woodland previously available to locals for recreation, camping, general appreciation of beauty will be fenced off, blown up, changed forever. This not good for the mental health of the community;
* Noise, trucks, spoil heap – not to mention the additional noise during construction, truck movements creating noise and damaging roads, and What Are They Going To Do with all that Contaminated Salt?

**Economic Impacts**

Projects like these usually come in trumpeting about job creation, how great they’ll be for the local economy, how much better off everyone will be – it is simply NOT TRUE.

* Job creation – additional jobs may be created but the skills required may not exist in the current community. So, Fly In Fly Out workers arrive, taking many of the jobs the locals thought would come to them, putting up rents;
* Job creation – companies have been known to inflate the job numbers in project applications – surely not!! Both in Construction and Operational phases. Will the IPC or NSW Government police this, if this project gets approval?
* Job losses – Santos agrees there will be job losses in agriculture and local manufacturing, which is the skill base of the locals currently;
* Benefit Fund and Compensation for Landholders - to get local communities to swallow the negative impacts of these projects, companies dangle compensation funds, build a changing hut on the public sports field or similar. The compensation is usually trivial by comparison to the upheaval to people’s lives, their loss of community, rising rents and the immense destruction caused to the surrounding area.

Otherwise known as ‘Trinkets for the Indians’.

And is it all necessary when there is currently a GLUT OF EXPORTED GAS from Queensland and Liquid Natural Gas tankers containing Australia gas sit idle. (Sydney Morning Herald 17 June 2020)

PLEASE DO NOT GRANT APPROVAL FOR THIS PROJECT.

Thank you for listening.