

Independent Planning Commission,

Narrabri Gas project

Dear members,

I am writing, as a member of the public, to express my deep concerns regarding the proposed development of a significant gas project in the Pilliga. The Narrabri Gas project proposes drilling 850 wells with their accompanying infrastructure of roads, pipelines and drill pads. Where do I start? The problems with this proposal are so many and across so many disciplines that it is hard to know which to highlight.

My concerns are across several areas which will be impacted should the proposal go ahead. The most pressing area of concern for me is environmental but this does not detract from the importance of ground water, indigenous heritage and the social impacts.

The Pilliga is the largest temperate woodland in New South Wales and Santos plans to clear almost one thousand hectares for drill pads and the interconnecting maze of roads and pipelines. This will have the obvious effect of breaking-up the broad swathe of forest into small chunks. Many of the smaller animals such as the (Vulnerable) Pilliga Mouse are unable to cross the 30 m wide strips of cleared forest. This restricts their home range to a pocket of forest which may, or may not, be viable. This can also lead to inbreeding as the Mouse is unable to seek a mate outside its prescribed area.

The Pilliga Mouse is one of 35 species of vertebrates which are Scheduled – either Vulnerable or Endangered. There are also 10 Threatened plant species.

One Endangered Ecological Community (EEC) occurs within the proposed gas field. It is the White Box-Yellow Box-Blakely's Red Gum grassy woodland and derived native grassland, listed as Critically Endangered under the EPBC Act and endangered under the TSC Act.

The Pilliga is a hugely significant landscape for Gomeroi people. Santos' Aboriginal cultural heritage assessment identified 90 known Aboriginal cultural heritage sites in the project area, including rock shelters, burials and historic camps and hearths. Giving the 'go-ahead' to the disruptive effects of a gas field just continues the invasion and trampling of their significant places. Previously such behaviour could be labelled as ignorant but to repeat the offence would be wilful.

Overriding all other considerations is the approaching tsunami of climate change. It cannot be ignored that this is a fossil fuel project. To meet its Paris agreement, Australia must not open new fossil fuel extraction projects. This project threatens all our lives and livelihoods and must be shelved.

I urge you to do the right thing. Protect the land, agriculture, endangered species and the planet – reject Santos' Narrabri Gas Field.

Yours sincerely,

Hugh W Nicholson