Submission re Santos Narrabri Gas Project.

Good day, I write with the urgent hope that the Independent Planning Commission remains so; in that thousands, indeed millions, of Australians have lost faith in the continued collusion between the Fossil Fuel Industry and both State and Federal governments, to the detriment of our current and future environmental and community health and resilience, as well as meaningful and lasting action on Climate Change.

There is not ONE REASON good enough to go ahead with the Narrabri Gas proposal and its inherent risks to agricultural land, forests, and the Great Artesian Basin.

For Australia and NSW to even contemplate such a plan is short-sighted, irresponsible and unpragmatic.

To actively continue subsidizing an ailing Fossil Fuel industry with little to recommend it’s past activities let alone future viability on world markets, where the flow of public and private sector investment along with international capital is increasingly swinging towards Renewable Energy and sustainable technologies, will not only expose Australia to future economic shocks and wasted investor funds, it is also the complete opposite of sound economic management.

Additionally, no-one of sane mind can possibly condone the profound and well-documented environmental risks proven to exist within the Unconventional Gas Industry. The numerous incidents that have led to contamination of ground water in every country involved, the massive quantities of water used, which in drought-prone Australia is nothing short of criminally negligent, the damage to agricultural land and massive waste storage ponds that will NEVER be secure enough NOT to RISK further contamination of ground water supplies, or the detrimental health effects on people, livestock and communities living nearby.

Indeed to continue with the Unconventional Gas Industry in NSW and elsewhere this country, and in the face of such concerted, concerned and prolonged opposition, makes it abundantly clear that many decision makers place little value on the profound importance of Australia’s social capital; on the hopes and well-being of fellow Australians, and on the continued health and resilience of our shared environment.

There is good reason countries like France, Germany, Scotland, Ireland and Bulgaria have banned Fracking completely, while many other countries and US states have also placed a Moratorium on it. Because it’s one of the most damaging, uneconomically viable and polluting industries to ever masquerade as a Climate solution. I must confess to being daily astounded by the short-sightedness and ignorance of Australian leadership as regards the vulnerability of our environment along with our absolute dependency on the continued health of that environment for our own continued health and prosperity. So please, listen to your fellow Australians. To the farmers and those living in Narrabri who assert that few of the promised jobs ever eventuated, that Santos has not brought prosperity to their region, that locals and various primary producers are deeply concerned about the proposal and yet no-one is listening to them. That all around Australia millions of people are against the Unconventional Gas Industry and will remain so. How discouraged and upset we have become because it seems big business calls the shots in this country and quite frankly we are all tired of it and deeply concerned by it. Indeed appalled.

We urgently need to safeguard our ground water and agricultural security despite various unfounded and self-interested assurances from Santos and the Gas Industry that safe-guards are in place and/or that they don’t intent to frack. Of course they will frack, especially as gas-wells approach the end of their life, so let’s not be naïve or swallow the industry hype. The Pilliga is one of only a handful of recharge zones that supplies **significant** quantities of fresh water to the Great Artesian Basin. In countries like Europe Recharge Zones are thereby fully protected because the water quality is of critical importance and any risk to ground water supplies must be firmly negated. Why aren’t we doing the same in Australia? A recent NASA study has documented large-scale assessments of ground water supplies via satellite fluctuations that allowed them to also measure ground water; currently indicating a CONTINUED DECLINE in Australia’s ground water storage and a consequential rise in associated expenses as it becomes more difficult to extract ground water for irrigation and other commercial purposes. This is deeply concerning and has profound implications for our agricultural security, as ultimately water, not gas, will always be our greatest environmental asset and source of resilience. So how can we even consider letting a Gas company anywhere near our critical recharge zones? Can Santos guarantee no ground water will ever be contaminated? No leaks will ever occur? No earth-quakes ever eventuate? Of course they can’t.

Then there’s Methane; a greenhouse gas on steroids; and yet the Unconventional Gas Industry just keeps pumping it out with Government backing as though Climate Science is just anouther parliamentary jaunt and they’ve got more important things to do. Right, so the continued well-being and survival of Life on Earth isn’t? Nothing could be more important than our future resilience and ability to survive and thrive, nothing. Australia is not just a business, it’s a continent. A series of fragile interconnected eco-systems already under huge pressure and suffering the long-term effects of a gross lack of ecological stewardship and environmental abuse. Meanwhile the Gas Industry can offer no assurances or capabilities that can yet adequately measure or account for the long-term post production migratory emissions of methane into the atmosphere; and indeed themselves admit to a “limited knowledge of how drilling and fracking create conditions for leakage long after a well has been de-commissioned.” Dimitri Lafluer. Geo-scientist.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we have reached a critical juncture re the immanent crisis of Climate Change; a scientifically projected collapse of eco-systems and weather systems that could make Covid 19 look like a Sunday afternoon picnic. David Attenborough and numerous reputable scientists aren’t joking about the small window of time we have left to act. About Australia’s extreme vulnerability to warming and desertification, about the damage we’ve already done to our fragile landscapes along with the large-scale decimation of forests despite the proven fact that forests are one of our greatest allies in the fight against Climate Change. Forests actively:

1. Help feed and replenish ground water totals.

2. Stabilise weather systems which is of acute importance.

3. Increase RAINFALL TOTALS VIA THE TRANSPIRATION -EVAPORATION CYCLE. Countless studies have shown a marked DECREASE in rainfall where logging has occurred, resulting in markedly lowered precipitation totals both in local areas and further afield.

4. Foster bio-diversity in both plant and animal species; thousands of medications and cancer treatments come from forests alone, while our native plant and animal species comprise a unique biological heritage that must be protected for future generations and our continued environmental health; so too under normal ( non-Covid 19 conditions ) they serve to attract tourism dollars from all over the world.

5. Cool ground temperatures and thereby also contribute to essential soil health.

6. Sequester carbon, produce oxygen and cool the atmosphere.

7. Stabilize Eco-Systems: NOTHING COULD BE MORE IMPORTANT. Eco-systems being indispensable to the well-being of people world-wide, from the availability of adequate food and water, to disease regulation of vectors, pests, and pathogens; human health and existence depends on these services from the natural environment and without which we cannot survive.

The Pilliga is NSW’s last large continuous remnant of temperate forest, yet the de-pressuring of local aquifers and subsequent availability of ground water, installation of roads and other infrastructure re installing 850 Gas wells, and the associated toxicity and devastation on the surrounding environment from drilling, will combine to reverse the continued health of the Pilliga forest, along with its crucial and critical contribution to ecological and community health. While Santos assert their environmental footprint can be managed, early stages of the project have indeed already proven otherwise, with high levels of salts, heavy metals and uranium detected in the ground water. They will also undoubtedly spread further afield as the gas runs out; leaving behind de-commissioned wells and surrounds that will continue to leak methane; not only in the immediate future, but over a vastly longer period; and thereby also raising our emissions and negating critical emissions reduction targets that are of huge global and local importance and significance. Then there’s the continued ruinous damage to large areas of agricultural land and forest; using untenable quantities of water, compromising the health and well-being of local communities, and potentially leaching toxic chemicals into critical ground water supplies even as Australia grows warmer and faces the bitter realities of Climate Change.

Let’s face it folks, despite industry assurances, Santos will not tread lightly on our country, their history demonstrates otherwise and a huge weight of evidence both in Australia and world-wide highlights that when it comes to the Unconventional Gas Industry indeed nothing could be further from the truth.

We live in urgent times, and as such have both a global and local responsibility to do far better than we are. To lead by example rather than hoard petty numbers like smug brats toting carry-over credits from yesterday’s footy game, having done exactly that to our shame at the last Climate Summit in Madrid. Did you know that parts of Africa are already 4 degrees warmer? That our Pacific Islands neighbours are literally watching the sea swamp their homes and many are already unable to grow food due to saline levels that also severely compromise drinking water supplies? That Australia emits more carbon emissions in the Pacific region than any other country? And please don’t tell me it’s a small percentage compared to the world. If every smaller country chooses to dodge our combined accountability and responsibility, then where will any of us be in 20-30 years’ time? Where will our children and grand-children be? They’ll be confronting brutal extremes of weather, eco-systems on the verge of collapse; no dependable rainfall or seasonal crop production and damaged or non-existent water availability. They’ll be disgusted and furious at our arrogance and selfishness, at our lack of commitment or concern for the future well-being and resilience of this great country Australia. For our mindless adherence to old technologies when this country has huge potential to invest and even export sustainable industries and renewable technologies. They’ll be hauling climate criminals into court for crimes against humanity, and they’ll have every bloody right to do so.

Please, for the sake of sanity, for the practical brilliance of common sense, and for the future resilience and long-term prosperity of this country and our children, don’t give Santos the go ahead at Narrabri. It’s time we turned and faced the future with resolve, courage, sustainability and commitment. It’s time we diversified into new technologies because hey, it’s gonna happen sooner or later so why not get the jump on it and remain competitive in emerging markets. We will never be able to move forward while we continually subsidize backwards, so it’s time to give fossil fuels the old heave-ho and get on with getting our house, and garden, into a more pragmatic, intelligent and well-balanced ecological order. Indeed we have no choice but to do so, so let’s just get on with it.

Regards, Anne Quinlivan.