

Anne McKenzie – Objection to Narrabri Gas Project Objection

I grew up on the Pilliga Rd, Coonamble. Our property joins the Pilliga Forrest. My brother continues to produce quality food for Australians. He, like all of the farmers around him, relies heavily on water from the Great Artesian Basin – especially through the recent drought.

I don't really know much about coal seam gas – not scientifically, not facts! However, that in itself scares me. Do any of us? Are we listening to the experts? I worry that in these days of extremist capitalism and justification for whatever it is we “want”, the science may not be seriously considered or if it is, it is cherry picked to fit the justification.

Following the Covid-19 crisis this will only be worse as we hear the calls for “jobs and energy security”. All needed, yes, but at what cost?

If there is one thing I have learnt at 62 it is that no matter what we learn in our lives, the lessons, the regrets, the ‘oulda’s’ (coulda, woulda, shoulda’s) that it is too late – we are forever moving forward and we cannot go back, we cannot undo what we have done, we cannot take back what has been said. The damage remains. An apology is not a “fix”, it is a band aid – it is only in the moment of action that we have the true power to do what is right – to act with integrity. After that it is too late! To make a fix is much, much harder, usually much more expensive, and what is lost remains lost.

Back to the gas at Narrabri – of the little I know, I worry most about the water. This most precious of liquid golds. This is what gives us life here on earth. In the recent drought we saw how the lack of it killed much of inland Australia. I'm sure there is now more desert, less ecological diversity and more human heartache. Slowly but surely Australia's arable land is reducing in size.

As one of the largest underground water reservoirs in the world, the Great Artesian Basin is an amazing resource. Our early explorers thought they would find an inland sea, but it was not above the ground but beneath their feet, out of site. Can we imagine further than what our eyes tell us? Can we look after and nurture this precious resource – even though we cannot see it? Perhaps Australia needs to put a high price on water. If it isn't used as drinking water for humans and animals, then it should have a high cost so it is honoured and saved! It should never be considered “free”.

With my limited knowledge of energy, I have been led to understand that Australia is more fortunate than most countries. We have many alternatives to gas that produce the same or better results for jobs and energy security. Why not invest in sources of energy we KNOW won't destroy our water resources – remember we can't go back – why take such an incredible risk? Why? For what – short term gain? For who? A small group of people? One earth, one life, no going back, damage done! Too late.

I have gas heating and hot water in my home. However, on July 21 I switched to solar for heating and cooling, and for hot water. The small owner operator company that installed my system lost no workers through the Covid lockdown, they did not need to apply for Jobkeeper and yet we hear that we need fossil fuel industry for employment? Really? If we all chose solar we would need so little gas it would be a thing of the past. The trend is for solar, for independence from the grid and eventually that will come. We can also find ways to use less and we are, as studies show gas demand is decreasing. Australia is the largest producer of gas in the world. Why is the Narrabri Gas Project necessary? Will we have to pay to clean up a stranded asset in the future?

The Project is located partially in the Pilliga Forest, which is public land, managed by a compliant state government. It seems like the perfect place – isolated, in an area that needs and welcomes investment. Although the gas is taken from underground, the surface is impacted by infrastructure, vehicle movements and water and air pollution, turning the rural area into an industrial area. Why not a solar farm on one of Santos' properties instead?

The Pilliga Forest has a rich diversity of animals and plants and if ever we have needed diversity, it is now. Mono cultures are not happy places. As all tourism will be local due to Covid-19, this is the perfect time to get people out to The Pilliga to experience the joys of huge skies and the many ecosystems which make Australia unique. On each continent there are many drives up to the highest mountain. Why not, as a tourism incentive, have a drive to tick off the many diverse ecosystems NSW or Australia has to offer?