29 July 2020

Dear members of the independent planning commission of the proposed Narrabri Gas Project,

My family lives in Coonabarabran and has lived there for generations for over 180 years. It has always been a tough place to survive. It gets very dry, very hot, and very cold. But it is home and it is breathtakingly beautiful. Our family has farms around Coonabarabran. They looked desolate during the last drought. They relied on groundwater to survive and keep their stock alive.

I am strongly against the proposed Narrabri Gas Project and I am concerned about all of the issues raised on the North West Alliance web page:

<https://www.csgfreenorthwest.org.au/narrabri_decision?utm_campaign=narrabri_gomeroi_women&utm_medium=email&utm_source=lockthegate>

There are too many reasons to list in this submission as to why this project is a harmful idea, But the list in that link covers most of it.

My main objection is that once the aquifer is poisoned, there is no going back. It will poison the lifeline of the surrounding farming community. And for what? Gas to be sold for peanuts overseas? Who is the stakeholder aiming to benefit from this? I’ll bet they don’t live in the area. I’ll bet they don’t actually care what happens to our farms and families.

I object to the claim that this gas project will ‘create jobs’. If the aquifers are poisoned, I am concerned that there will be a net loss of jobs instead, and whole communities will turn into ghost towns. This is not worth a few gas mining jobs if we lose many more in the process. Do the existing local stakeholders whose livelihoods and jobs are threatened by this project have protection or precedence? Are there any rights protecting their livelihoods and quality of life? What guarantees are offered for them?

The infrastructure of all the machinery, wells, pipes, and roads cost how much? How much energy will go into making all of that? What precious resources will be sunk into that infrastructure? How many heavy vehicles will be damaging the public roads? Who pays to fix those roads? Where is the toxic waste going?

Please consider: What would the equivalent amount of energy generated by renewables cost? What effects would renewable energy projects have on the local environment, aquifers, farms and communities?

Renewable energy would also have the benefit of not needing giant flames burning 24/7 like the gas wells. These flames are a hazard in such dry bushland, as well as being light pollution for the local space observatories, which selected the neighbouring Warrumbungle Mountains because of their dark skies. On a planet where dark skies are becoming increasingly rare they are increasingly valuable. (If you haven’t gone stargazing out there, I highly recommend it.)

It seems clear that there are cleaner and more competitive options available. So, what is the sense in pushing through something that so many are opposed to? There is already a global transition to clean energy underway and it could mean that gas becomes unsalable before the end of the life of this project. This could mean it is a bad investment, and not worth starting.

My suggestion is to leave it in the ground, at least for now anyway. It’s not like it’s going anywhere. We could still access it if we are ever desperate for gas. But right now, let’s do something else, which could prove to be more profitable in the short and long term. Whilst the climate is changing in strange ways, and droughts and bushfires are putting profound stress on habitats and communities, let’s do something that benefits everyone, not just a few out of touch billionaires.

I suggest working with farmers to install renewable energy projects that will add to and support existing jobs and stakeholders. Farmers would welcome the extra income stream. And by developing renewables on open farmland we can avoid trampling what’s left of our native forests.

Sincerely,

Ali Rayner and family.

Long-time residents of Coonabarabran.