

OBJECTION TO THE NARRABRI GAS PROJECT

Annie Kia

I object to the proposed Narrabri Gas project, and ask the Independent Planning Commission to apply the Precautionary Principle in reaching a decision to reject the project.

The Precautionary Principle: a definition from the World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology:

"When human activities may lead to morally unacceptable harm that is scientifically plausible but uncertain, actions shall be taken to avoid or diminish that harm. Morally unacceptable harm refers to harm to humans or the environment that is

- threatening to human life or health, or
 - serious and effectively irreversible, or
 - inequitable to present or future generations, or
 - imposed without adequate consideration of the human rights of those affected."¹
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Harm to our climate from gasfields is proven. On this issue alone, and taking into account all the criteria in the definition above, the Narrabri gas project must be rejected.

In 2019 we endured the hottest, driest year on record, and the most extreme fire season in eastern Australia ever experienced. Uncontrollable fires raged for months, eclipsing the unprecedented Siberian and Californian wildfires in the same year. Fires burnt more than 12.6 million hectares, including a staggering 5.4 million hectares in NSW alone.¹ The catastrophe was anticipated by fire experts. Climate scientists have made clear that burning fossil fuels heats the climate, creates more extreme fire conditions, and contributed to the disaster². Firefighters and citizens were killed, more than a billion animals perished, their habitat decimated. Businesses and towns lay in ruins. The economic and health impacts are immense, and still being counted.

¹ The size of Australia's bushfire crisis captured in five big numbers <https://www.abc.net.au/news/science/2020-03-05/bushfire-crisis-five-big-numbers/12007716>

² Summer of Crisis, The Climate Council 2020 <https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Crisis-Summer-Report-200311.pdf>

All this happened with just over 1°C of global heating. But on current trajectories, we are on track for 3-5°C of climate heating this century. To get this in perspective, during the last ice age, Manhattan island was covered in more than a kilometre of glacial ice. The climate at that time was 3-5°C below the holocene climate that made expansion of human civilisations possible. That is the kind of difference made by a 3-5°C shift in Earth's climate. By extracting and burning fossil fuels, we are causing a shift in our climate system to one of extremes: fires, droughts, extreme rainfall events, not to mention a relentless rise in sea level as glaciers collapse and retreat. The consequences for Earth's climate - our life support system - are of catastrophic scale and consequence.³

Climate scientists advise that the heating of our climate contributed to our summer of hell. Except it was not just summer. Where I live in northern NSW, fires began in late winter and burnt for months.

The Narrabri Gas Project would produce a total of 127.8 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent. Yet the UN Environment Program's Production Gap Report 2019 found that to achieve the Paris Climate Agreement goal of keeping average global warming below 2 degrees, global gas production **needs to peak this year.**² The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has articulated the terrible consequences of pumping more carbon into the atmosphere.⁴

The above definition for the Precautionary Principle cites four conditions, any one of which could render a project unacceptable. On the issue of climate harm the Narrabri Project ticks all of them.

This project, through its contribution to global heating, would threaten human life and health; contribute to irreversible catastrophic harm; be inequitable to future generations; and do this without consideration of the human rights of those affected. To get the scale of risk into perspective, I ask that you read the appended *Trajectories of the Earth System in the Anthropocene*⁵

³ Trajectories of the Earth System in the Anthropocene, Will Steffan et al , PNAS 2018 <https://www.pnas.org/content/115/33/8252>

⁴ Global Warming of 1.5C, IPCC 2018 <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>

⁵ op. cit.

During the public hearings conducted by the Independent Planning Commission, you have heard many submissions from experts and citizens. These include but are not restricted to: risks to the Great Artesian Basin: risks to farming and ecosystems from massive salt waste: risks to farming from an industry that is uninsurable; risks of bushfires from the introduction of multiple ignition points; and harm to Gomeroi traditional custodians who have already suffered so much loss, and for whom a gasfield in the Pilliga is heartbreaking. These are all in addition to the risks to Earth's climate articulated above.

In weighing all the risks and issues presented to you, I ask that you apply the above definition of the Precautionary Principle, with it's four categories, any one of which can constitute unacceptable harm:

"When human activities may lead to morally unacceptable harm that is scientifically plausible but uncertain, actions shall be taken to avoid or diminish that harm. Morally unacceptable harm refers to harm to humans or the environment that is

- threatening to human life or health, or
- serious and effectively irreversible, or
- inequitable to present or future generations, or
- imposed without adequate consideration of the human rights of those affected."¹

Using this definition, I ask you to consider that the Precautionary Principle applies when

- there exist considerable scientific uncertainties;
- there exist scenarios (or models) of possible harm that are scientifically reasonable (that is based on some scientifically plausible reasoning);
- the potential harm is sufficiently serious or even irreversible for present or future generations or otherwise morally unacceptable;
- there is a need to act now, since effective counter-action later will be made significantly more difficult or costly at any later time.³

Given the immensity, scale and seriousness of so many of the risks posed by the Narrabri Gas Project, I ask that you reject it.

Please note that I have appended two other documents:

- ***The Precautionary Principle***, World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology 2005, Attached as PDF. Easier to read online <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000139578>
- ***Trajectories of the Earth System in the Anthropocene***, Will Steffan et al , PNAS 2018 <https://www.pnas.org/content/115/33/8252>

¹ The Precautionary Principle, World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology 2005, Attached as PDF. Easier to read online <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000139578>

² UNEP, The Production Gap Report 2019

³ The Precautionary Principle, op. cit.

⁴ The Precautionary Principle, op.cit.