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Sent: Friday, 19 June 2020 9:44 PM
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Subject: Submission: Santos Narraba gas project

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To: the Independent Planning Commission
NSW Government

I am writing to urge you in the strongest possible terms to reject Santos' Narrabri gas project recently deemed 'approvable' by the State Government.

The reasons why this proposed gas project should not proceed are based on a wide range of arguments, scientifically proven and relating both to the very real long-term threats to the environment, to the economy, and to the livelihood of those living and farming within the Narrabri/Pilliga region, not to mention the wider agricultural region dependent on the Great Artesian Basin.

Above all, contrary to the Government's claims, gas is *not* an economic nor low-emission form of energy as a transition to a clean energy future: numerous scientific and economic studies have clearly demonstrated that the production of electricity by gas is now more expensive than the use of renewable technologies *already available*. Furthermore, the CO₂/methane emissions from CSG mining are even greater than from coal: as Professor Ingraffea of Cornell University has shown ([Methane and the Greenhouse-Gas Footprint of Natural Gas from Shale Formations](#), Cornell University 2011), it is physically impossible to ensure a gas well does not leak, and it is these 'fugitive emissions' which contribute a large part of the overall emissions of gas. The promotion by the Federal Government of gas as the principle transition source of energy is based on demonstrably false economics and a fundamentally false measure of emissions which would in fact represent a backwards step in any attempt to lower Australia's emissions, currently among the highest per capita in the world.

The Pilliga, at the centre of the proposed Narrabri project, is home to the Gomeroi/Gamilaraay people who have objected to this proposed development which would cause significant damage to their ancestral lands.

The Pilliga forest, which I had the privilege of visiting from Sydney last year, is unique in being the largest native forest west of the Great Divide and home to a wide range of natural fauna including more than 900 species, among which are many threatened species, not least the koala which is under particular threat following last summer's horrendous bushfires which mercifully spared this unique natural environment.

Demand for gas-powered electricity has already fallen by over 40% since 2014. With the ever-increasing need to cut emissions to reduce the threat of critical climate change, the expansion of gas as an energy source not only makes no sense, but presents a serious threat to Australia's already internationally-embarrassing slow progress towards a clean energy, low-emissions future.

There is a serious risk to health from gas mining in the wide array of chemicals used in drilling and hydraulic fracturing and released from the coal seams. Santos has already sunk a small number of test wells in this region - as I witnessed on my visit to the Pilliga, the negative impact on the environment from leaked chemicals even in these isolated, individual wells is clearly visible. Santos has proposed drilling over 800 operational CSG wells in the region. The expansion of CSG drilling will result in waste water laden with toxic salts and metals. Santos has no clear plan for how to dispose of the >430,000 tonnes of waste they will bring to the surface. This puts the health of farmers and of the wider population living in the area at serious risk, and there is overwhelming local opposition. As the local newspaper *The Courier* noted

on 18 May 2020 'Of all the 22,949 valid submissions made in relation to the proposed project (a record response), 22,484 (98 per cent) objected to it – the largest opposition to any project in the history of NSW'. These submissions included an overwhelming majority of objections from the local population. Furthermore, the proposed CSG drilling in the Narrabri threatens the Great Artesian Basin, since the shale gas lies beneath the Basin which must be drilled through, and have high-pressure toxic chemicals pumped through in order to extract the gas. Quite frankly, it beggars belief that the supposed (but demonstrably unreal) short-term economic benefits of 20-30 years of low-employment CSG mining in the region is even being considered against the very real prospect of substantial if not total destruction not only of farming on the local, agriculturally rich Liverpool Plains, but also of the much wider area of Australia's agricultural and farming economy reliant on the Great Artesian Basin. Narrabri gas threatens the Great Artesian Basin, which supports at least \$12.8 billion in economic activity. In contrast, international prices for gas are set to fall even further as the world moves increasingly to renewable energy sources, and the longer-term economics of gas simply don't make sense. It is worth noting that the Insurance Australia Group (IAG) has recently confirmed its major rural and regional insurer, WFI, will join its other subsidiary, CGU, in no longer providing the coverage if there is "unconventional gas" operations on properties.

Yours

Professor Barra Boydell



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