

**INDEPENDENT PLANNING COMMISSION'S ELECTRONIC PUBLIC HEARING FOR THE NARRABRI GAS PROJECT** **23/7/20**

Commissioners and others attending.

You may be familiar with the quote by Victor Hugo, the French novelist, "Nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come." In contrast, the Santos Pilliga gas project is an idea whose time has come, and gone. It is at least 10 years too late. Too late for effective long-term integration into Australia's changing energy systems, too late for private sector investment, and too late for a safe climate.

Ten years ago, gas-peaking plants were considered useful to complement renewable energy because they can be turned on quickly to generate electricity. Yet as far back as 2012, energy industry insiders were saying that gas is not a transition fuel we should be investing in. Now we have powerful hydro storage schemes like Snowy 2.0, and advanced battery solutions like the Tesla Hornsdale site in South Australia, this is definitely not the time for a new large-scale gas project to be approved.

While burning gas results in 50% fewer carbon emissions than coal, the life-cycle emissions from gas are greater. The drilling and extraction of gas from wells, and its transport in pipelines, all result in leakage of methane. Methane has 100 times the warming impact of CO<sub>2</sub> over 20 years, making it a far more potent greenhouse gas. And it only takes a 2.6% methane leakage from production, to make burning 1 tonne of gas generate nearly twice the emissions as burning a tonne of coal. Some USA gas fields have fugitive emissions as high as 17% (170 times that claimed by the industry). There is no safe level of methane emissions.

Australian reporting of unconventional gas fugitive emissions lags behind best practice and is beset by a number of weaknesses, including the lack of baseline measurements, reliance on pre-determined emission factors, and gaps in reporting of emissions.

In February 2019, in the Land and Environment Court, Chief Justice Brian Preston handed down his decision in an appeal by Gloucester Resources, fighting the land-mark rejection by the IPC of its bid to build a new coal mine near the town of the same name. The judge concluded that an open-cut coal mine would be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Explaining his insistence on it being the wrong time, Justice Preston said the mine and its coal would increase global emissions at a time we urgently need a rapid and deep decrease. He said there must be a carbon budget – the total amount of emissions that can be released if the Paris Climate Agreement targets are to be met.

A carbon budget can be applied to both nations and globally. It is the amount of coal, oil and gas, measured in tonnes of emissions, we can mine, produce, transport and burn, for a given, predictable, global and local temperature rise. Human activities have released approximately 1,475 gigatons of CO<sub>2</sub> from safe storage in the ground since 1850 - early in the Industrial Revolution. We have already used two thirds of the global carbon budget. Australia's fair share of

the remaining carbon budget is 10 gigatons of carbon dioxide. (I use the word 'fair' in a moral sense – if we don't do our fair share we are being free-loaders, free-riders and laggards – shirking our duty to make a fair contribution to tackle climate change).

At current global emission rates, with no new fossil fuel projects, in 10 years we will have consumed all of what's left in the budget to stay within the so-called 'safe' limit of 2° of warming. Therefore, if new fossil fuel projects are allowed, existing operations with a 10-year life span will have to be closed, as new ones open. There is little likelihood of this happening, so we have to control what we can, and that is to reject new projects. Difficult as this is, it has been done before.

We should not take risks with the climate that we would not take with roads, bridges and buildings, or cars and aircraft. A safe climate is absolutely critical to our survival on so many counts. We should listen to the experts, as we have done during the Covid-19 crisis. This means taking the best available climate science advice, which says the world has to halve emissions by 2030 and reach net zero emissions by 2040 (not 2050), to stay within the 2° limit. This needs a sustained effort to reduce emissions by around 4%, every year, to 2040, starting now. Australia's energy sector must carry the greatest share of this emissions-reduction because it has the easiest, low-hanging fruit – the technology exists.

There are clean, zero emission energy resources waiting to be scaled up from the current 24% of national electricity generation. All of the proposed uses for the Pilliga gas - domestic, light industrial and heavy industrial - can be replaced with existing technologies using electricity generated from renewable sources.

For these reasons, please reject this proposal.

Authored by Harry Creamer on behalf of all members.

Harry Creamer is a retired NSW public servant and a founding member of Climate Change Australia (Hastings) based at Port Macquarie on the mid north coast of New South Wales.

E: [harry.creamer@hotmail.com](mailto:harry.creamer@hotmail.com)

M 0431 158 252

<http://www.climatechangehastings.org.au/>

Comments are provided in good faith to assist with the 2020 IPC Narrabri Gas Project public hearings. CCA supports any policies that are serious and effective in tackling climate change and increasing renewable energy.

