

Warren Pipeline Action Group IPC Submission

The Warren Pipeline Action Group, WPAG, was formed to investigate and educate the community on the proposal for the Western Slopes Pipeline by APA. Over the past 4 years, members of our group have studied multiple scientific papers, been involved on community consultative committees with APA, have visited Queensland communities with unconventional gas industry, have visited the Pilliga forest and surrounding communities, and surveyed our local community for their opinion on coal seam gas.

WPAG have concluded that there is overwhelming evidence to reject the Santos Narrabri Gas Project, NGP, as well as the Western Slopes Pipeline.

Our members have experienced an extreme drought in which all surface water including river sources dried up. The only water security we had was provided by subsurface aquifers and the Great Artesian Basin. The water risk assessment for the Santos NGP is based upon very basic modelling which we conclude is totally inadequate to guarantee water security for our existing businesses or for future generations. Adaptive management should not be considered on such little information. Our members have never heard of a project being shut down after being approved due to further data coming to light during development. Realistically, the project always proceeds, with the consequences left to the community to deal with in the long term.

Our community has invested heavily in securing the Great Artesian Basin supply via the Cap and Pipe scheme and yet the NGP can effectively put this all at risk. We witnessed, in Queensland, landholder's bores becoming unproductive; now being belatedly investigated by the Queensland Government after it is too late. With an inadequate model for baseline data, we as landholders would not be able to prove Coal Seam Gas extraction was the cause of any loss of pressure in our bores. Effectively just leaving us as collateral damage.

There is absolutely no basis for putting at risk the most significant recharge area of the GAB Surat Basin. The GAB is a limited resource taking millions of years to develop. Recharge areas are of massive significance and should be treated as an asset for highest protection.

The Santos proposal and the DPIE assessment does not give adequate scientific justification for saying there is no connectivity between the subsurface aquifers and the deep coal seams that they would exploit. Existing methane in local bores on the edge of the project area suggests there are linkages. Reports to the Chief Scientist did suggest the presence of faulting.

The construction of the proposed APA pipeline, which may be a necessary requirement for this project, also puts the water supply of the Macquarie River at risk. It also threatens the Marthaguy Creek and multiple other river systems. Vertisol soils are totally unsuitable for high pressure gas pipelines. Floodplain hydrology in the Macquarie Valley is extremely changeable and subject to erosion and yet the pipeline route crosses the most heavily flooded part of the valley.

There is no valid economic reason to mine coal seam gas from the Pilliga when there is an oversupply of gas in the world and when Australia is the biggest exporter of gas. This region should not have to suffer the consequences of a lack of government policy which has resulted in domestic prices being so over inflated. This project will not bring down gas prices.

1% acknowledged increases in GHG emissions from the NGP by the DPIE should be reason to not proceed. Our members understand the impacts of climate change as we live it every day. We are the ones that run out of water, suffer the health consequences of living in constant dust or deal with extreme storms and floods. It is our Australian regional communities that are being impacted by

climate change. We are the ones that have been farming in this region for multiple generations and want our children to have the same opportunity. Climate change continues to put our businesses at risk, our water supply at risk, our health at risk, and our community structures under extreme strain.

The regional cumulative impacts of this project on water, in conjunction with other users, has not been addressed in any of the assessments. All the aquifers and surface water sources are under huge strain due to the expansion of mining in the area, climate change, and agricultural needs. This project is not just about the Pilliga area – Santos has indicated to shareholders this is stage 1, with 6 other fields across the region already being mapped and explored. The IPC cannot afford to be hamstrung by direction that it assesses this Pilliga stage in isolation. That is not reality.

The review of the Chief Scientists recommendations by the NSW parliament exposed the problems with insurance in the Coal Seam Gas industry. We are the landholders that will host infrastructure on our land and yet IAG and other insurers will not provide public liability. Similarly, we sign vendor declarations guaranteeing our produce, yet pipeline companies can access and treat weeds etc on our land whenever they want. There is no fence along the pipeline route, we have no power to prevent access and yet we bear the risk. Our biosecurity plans are totally compromised under these circumstances.

Our members are also concerned by the wider impacts of the Santos NGP on health. We are already impacted by mental health issues due to the pressure of dealing with this threat to our business. Mental health is totally under resourced in this area. Our health services are all linked with our regional hospitals dealing with public from the Pilliga communities as well as our region, among others. They are ill equipped to deal with existing pressures let alone increased demand. Queensland communities are showing significant increases in the demands on health services in coal seam gas areas, especially with children.

Greg Mullins presented evidence of the risk of catastrophic bushfire with this project. Our bushfire brigades are called upon to assist our neighbouring regions in these situations. Fires in the Pilliga are extreme fires with very high risk for firefighters – any increase in risk for our members is not acceptable. Flaring on extreme days should never be considered, let alone approving a project that increases climate change and thus the incidence of bushfire.

This submission has left the scientific evidence that exposes multiple flaws in the Santos proposal to other presentations, however WPAG wants to make it clear that we will oppose the APA pipeline with all means possible. We will also provide support to oppose the NGP. This is not an environmentally sustainable project, there is no intergenerational justice and no public interest justification. We feel the DPIE has abrogated its responsibility in its assessment to the EPA, relying on unwritten multiple management plans, unspecified triggers, adaptive management and reporting by Santos, with no consideration for our community or our children.