

# Report on the existing and prospective Social Impacts of the Narrabri Gas Project on the region of North-West NSW.

A submission to the Independent Planning Commission Hearing on the Narrabri Gas Project

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## 1) Introduction

This submission to the IPC Hearing regarding the Narrabri Gas Project has been prepared by Gemma Viney, a PhD Candidate at the Sydney Environment Institute, University of Sydney. This report details an investigation into the Social Impacts, current, prospective and cumulative, of the Narrabri Gas Project and affiliated development projects. Ms Viney has been mentored throughout this research process by Senior Research Fellow, Dr. Rebecca Lawrence, who was commissioned by DPIE as social impacts expert in the Rocky Hill case in the LEC and has over a decade of social impact expertise.

The findings of this report are drawn from a wide array of literature on the social impacts of resource projects, from community experiences of comparable projects (e.g. Vickery) and from an analysis of 9 interviews with residents from Narrabri and surrounding communities, undertaken over the phone and recruited via the networks of the North-West Alliance. This data set will also be used by Gemma Viney in her Doctoral thesis. The interviews have been transcribed and coded using the NSW Department of Planning and Environment's (2017) Social Impact Assessment Guideline's 'Checklist of Matters'. The results are presented using this same framework, with each matter broken down by the relevant social impacts that proved significant in an analysis of the interviews.

## 2) Executive Summary

The findings of this report are based on an analysis of nine interviews with residents of Narrabri and the surrounding regions regarding the existing and prospective social impacts of the Narrabri Gas Project. The results are structured using the language of the NSW Department of Planning and Environment's (2017) Social Impact Guideline 'Checklist of Matters', in order to demonstrate the existing depth and breadth of these impacts that would only be exacerbated by the approval of this development.

### 2.1) Summary of Results

#### Lost Time/Campaign Fatigue

- **All participants described having invested significant time into their engagement with Santos and the Narrabri Gas Project.**
- Eight of nine participants directly referred to the loss of time as an impact they are already experiencing.
- Participants described difficulties seeking clarification on how the project would be impacting their community, and often their own property.
- Participants who had been actively and continuously engaged with the anti-CSG movement also relayed a sense of unfairness that the process of evaluating the project has spanned years, all the while requiring consistent and encompassing effort from the community

#### Community Cohesion and Wellbeing

- **The matter most commonly raised by participants was the implications of the Narrabri Gas project for surrounding communities, and more specifically the fracturing of social bonds as a result of the divisiveness of the development.**
- Respondents across three different communities relayed the perception that discussions of the Narrabri Gas Project had become 'taboo'
- Six participants alleged that the fracturing of relationships in Narrabri and the surrounding communities was the direct intent of Santos.

## Built Environment

- **All nine participants framed the procedural structures surrounding the assessment and approval of the Narrabri Gas Project as illegitimate and untrustworthy.**
- In particular, this was explored through the lack of observable accountability for the proponent to either meet their safety and community obligations or be held responsible for any failures to do so.

## Economic Impacts

- **Five participants referred to the shifting physical and social landscape in the face of resource extraction as a threat to the economic prosperity of the community.**
- Three participants raised the issue of insurance and being unable to gain clarification with regard to liability should mining infrastructure result in crop contamination on their property.

## Threat to Regional Amenity

- **The threat to regional amenity posed by the Narrabri Gas Project was explored both in the immediate impact to standard of living as a result of disruption to surroundings, and in the mental and emotional impacts experienced by participants grappling with the potential industrialisation of the environment and landscape.**
- Five participants directly referred to the industrialisation of the region as a key concern should the project be approved.

## Questions of Access

- **Four participants questioned who was being allowed access where, and when, specifically with regard to injustice in the extent to which Santos' interests were being prioritised over the community.**
- This was largely centred around access to privatisation of the Pilliga State forest.

The findings of this research indicate that there are substantial personal, and community impacts already being experienced by residents in Narrabri and the surrounding regions as a

direct result of the Narrabri Gas Project. Some of the most significant results are in the extent to which respondents had already lost time, both personally and professionally, to researching and seeking clarification as to how this project will impact the community. This is in addition to the broader impacts on the social, cultural and economic stability of the region, and the consistent reports from participants in this study that the development is a source of considerable community disruption.

All nine participants also felt that the processes surrounding the assessment and evaluations of the Narrabri Gas Project were unjustly biased towards the project's approval. Respondents demonstrated considerable mistrust in both the proponent and the government, with a consistent perception that mining interests were being prioritised over the welfare of local communities and the protection of regional and global environmental security. The results suggest that the approval of the Narrabri Gas Project would not only exacerbate existing personal and community wide impacts, but create new more lasting issues across the region which may ultimately lead to a complete breakdown of the current social, cultural and economic way of life

### 3) Methods of Research

The findings of this report are based on a series of interviews undertaken with residents in the regions surrounding the Narrabri Gas Project and affiliated developments (such as the as yet unconfirmed APA pipeline). It should be noted that non-Narrabri residents were included in this study to ensure that the full, expansive and cumulative impacts associated with the approval of this project are acknowledged and addressed in the Commission's determination of this matter. As will be explored in the discussion of results, developments such as the APA pipeline are already having impacts on residents whose properties are along the proposed route and therefore must be considered when evaluating the benefits and risks Narrabri Gas Project as a whole.

Participants for this research were first contacted by email using the networks of the North-West Alliance and were asked to send an expression of interest to the researcher indicating they would like to participate. All respondents were sent information regarding the nature of the project and how the results would be published before providing consent to be interviewed. This study is limited by the fact that all interviewees were against the approval of the proposed project. However, given the breadth of the opposition to the project, with 63% of local and 98% of total responses submitted to the department opposing the development, the study provides an important documentation of the social impact issues underpinning this broad community opposition.

The interviews were semi-structured and consisted of 5 open ended questions regarding the positive and negative impacts of the Narrabri Gas Project on both individuals and their communities, as well as what impacts they were anticipating should the development be approved. Interviews were recorded with the consent of participants and transcribed by the researcher for ease of coding.

The primary method of analysis used in the interpretation of the data was content analysis, based on a text specific codebook. The transcripts were coded using the NSW Department of Planning and Environment (2017) Social Impact Assessment guidelines 'Checklist of Matters' as a structure, and then again using a Social Impact framework to examine how the

experiences of landowners translate into social impacts for individuals and the community. The results are organized in this same way, using DPIE's Checklist of Matters as a structure to frame a discussion regarding the social impacts that can be observed in the experiences and articulations of respondents.

The report employs both quantitative and qualitative data, however the number of respondents (n:9) has meant that the analysis has focussed on a qualitative analysis. The results of this analysis are displayed in figures throughout the text using direct quotation to most accurately represent the experiences of the respondents, as well as in tables where cumulative data is more pertinent. All references to respondents, as well as any quotations or testimonies used throughout the text, have been completely anonymised in order to best protect the identities of the participants. While the sample size for this study is limited with only 9 respondents, the intent of the research is to investigate the experiences and concerns of local residents as representative of existing and prospective social impacts resulting from the proposed project. The findings are supported by social impact literature, as well as parallels with other cases raised by the respondents.

## 4) Results

The results of this report are structured using the DPIE Social Impact Assessment Guidelines, with the concerns of the respondents grouped by the matter most relevant to the issue they are describing. For the purpose of this report however we have included an additional matter, that being the impacts of lost time and experiences of campaign fatigue, as this issue was raised consistently across eight of the nine participants. This section deals with six key impacts: 1) Lost Time/Campaign Fatigue, 2) Community Cohesion and Wellbeing, 3) Economic Impacts, 4) Built Environment, 5) Threats to Regional Amenity and 6) Questions of Access.

### 4.1) Lost Time/Campaign Fatigue

One of the most significant findings of this research has been the recurrence of lost time as a key social impact of this development. All participants described having invested time into their engagement with Santos and the Narrabri Gas Project. Eight of nine participants then directly referred to the loss of time, to both researching and campaigning against the Narrabri Gas Project, as an impact they are already experiencing. While impacts regarding lost time are not listed in DPIE's checklist of matters the department acknowledges that this is not exhaustive, and the frequency with which it was raised by participants shows the significance of this impact on the community. Loss of time was largely raised in the contexts of time away from work and family, as can be seen in figure 1.

*Not only does it take me away from the things that must happen, but it also takes you away from looking at improvements or at market opportunities, it stops efficiencies from being researched and it's just a really negative impact.*

**Respondent #3**

*I would say, yes, we've had a huge impact and it's been negative, and the impacts have been a huge amount of my time spent on trying to find out the truth and what it's going to mean to our farming program.*

**Respondent #2**

*I've got grandchildren which I'd much prefer to go and see rather than banging my head up against a brick wall out at Narrabri... It's very stressful. And there have been times where I've just had to take a deep breath, take a step back and walk away for a few weeks just to unwind.*

**Respondent #6**

**Figure 1: Extracts on lost time as a result of the Narrabri Gas Project**

It should be noted that the time invested by participants was not all centred around actions opposing the project. Instead, participants described difficulties seeking clarification or even a basic understanding of exactly how the project would be impacting their community, and often their own property. Social Impact scholarship clearly outlines the importance of prior and informed consent, and the necessity for ongoing, open consultation with communities in order to meet best practice (O'Faircheallaigh 1999; Vanclay and Van Dijk 2020). However, participants describe not only feeling ignored, and at times even lied to, by Santos but having had to undertake extensive research to investigate questions which both the proponent and the department failed to answer. Lost time is thus not only a personal concern for individuals engaging with developers, but indicative of a structural procedural injustice<sup>1</sup> which requires land holders and community members to take on a kind of assessment processes of their own. It also demonstrates a mistrust from communities for the department's capacity to fairly evaluate the benefits and risks of a project, and to monitor the proponent's commitment to maintaining social and environmental standards in the future. Extracts regarding the time and effort required from participants to investigate the legitimacy of both Santos and the Department's claims are shown in figure 2.

*I've written so many flipping letters to politicians. And research! The time it takes to research all this stuff, and to get to the truth of it.*  
**Respondent #7 (KM)**

*I don't know how many hundreds of hours and everything else I've put into it... I don't regret a minute of it, but my point is from a social aspect I shouldn't have to be doing this. My elected representative in parliament should be helping to protect my land, instead they're helping to destroy it. And I think that's one of the biggest bug bears we have.*  
**Respondent #6**

**Figure 2: Extracts on time and research spent by participants investigating scope and impacts of the Narrabri Gas Project**

Lastly, this issue of lost time was explored in relation to both personal and community efforts to protest the Narrabri Gas Project, and the weariness that comes from a near 10-year struggle to protect one's land and community. Interviewees who had been actively and continuously engaged with the anti-CSG movement also relayed a sense of unfairness that the process of evaluating the project has spanned years, all the while requiring consistent

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<sup>1</sup> Procedural justice describes the transparency and accessibility of political processes for those impacted by a project, development or more broadly, environmental harm (Pearsall & Pierce 2017; Walker 2009)

and encompassing effort from the community. Scholarship on the social impacts of resource extraction details the phenomenon of *campaign fatigue*, in which communities facing decade long battles with mining companies will eventually begin to acquiesce, in what Shriver et al. (2019) describe as a 'pattern of acceptance' with themes of inevitability and disempowerment. Campaign fatigue is also fostered in the dynamics of powerlessness and disenfranchisement brought about by the unjust prioritisation of mining interests over communities, and in the confusion associated with an overload of poorly communicated information which communities are required to sift through in order to understand the full scope of a project. Extracts demonstrating the experience of campaign fatigue with regard to the Narrabri Gas Project are shown in figure 3.

*My biggest fear is that next week, or no by the 4th of sept, when the IPC has had their 12 weeks that they're going to approve it and that we will be doing this indefinitely*  
**Respondent #3**

*You can't argue when there are no arguments you know, so not only is the social impact what it may do to your area but while you're fighting it, they're just really taxing everyone who's fighting it by ignoring them and frustrating them.*  
**Respondent #3**

*And so, it's a huge amount of stress I suppose, sleepless nights of going omg what about this and what if this happen, it's many hours of sleepless nights and many hours of research.*  
**Respondent #2**

**Figure 3: Extracts demonstrating the experience of Campaign Fatigue.**

#### 4.2) Community cohesion and wellbeing

The matter most commonly raised by participants was the implications of the Narrabri Gas project for surrounding communities. The NSW DPIE Guidelines identifies social impacts on community as including (not exhaustively) matters of health, safety, social cohesion and resilience and housing. Throughout the interviews there were several explorations of these impacts, the most frequently mentioned of which was the divisive impact of the project on community members, and the consequences of this both on the personal relationships of participants and more broadly their sense of social cohesion. Regarding the personal impact, respondents described feeling unable to openly protest, or even discuss, the

Narrabri Gas Project for fear of the ramifications their opposition might have on relationships with friends, neighbours and within community organisations. One respondent described a shroud of distrust across their neighbourhood that had been seeded by the implication from Santos that a landowner in their immediate locality had accepted money to host worker accommodation on their property. Another described the breakdown of a local community recreation group based solely on disagreements amongst members regarding the development. Six of nine participants made direct reference to the shift this project has forced in how they operate socially even within close circles, examples of which can be seen in figure 4.

*It also means that I don't really want to face this fellow (neighbour), instead of if I'd ran into him down the street I would normally have a conversation about whatever - I'm now really guarded about what we talk about because I don't want to end up in an argument of words already over this project.*

**Respondent #2**

*Even amongst your closest friends unless you really knew what their opinion was you just stayed away from it.*

**Respondent #4**

**Figure 4: Extracts describing personal experiences of social division as a result of the Narrabri Gas Project**

Additionally, respondents across three different communities described a more general perception that discussions of the Narrabri Gas Project had become 'taboo'. In particular, this was raised in reference to the silencing of a majority of community members who were opposed to the project but not actively engaged in the anti-CSG movement for fear of the social ramifications. While this impact is based on the observations of respondents, it highlights a persistent experience of feeling isolated and unable to openly discuss the potential benefits and risks of a project in community settings. This is conveyed through the extracts in Figure 5.

*I mean, it's become a no go zone for people to talk about, certainly this was when I was living in Narrabri, you just don't talk about Narrabri gas project because there are people on either side, and it was a really really strong divide, so you just you didn't talk about it.*

**Respondent #4**

*The people in Narrabri are not even game to open their mouths and speak about it because of the pressures that have been brought on them by others in the town.*

**Respondent #6**

*It's very uncomfortable already, do you talk about it when you have them over to dinner no you don't. So, it's already divided our community and it's already caused angst in our community in that neighbours that get together on a Friday night to normally socialise now they have this taboo topic.*

**Respondent #2**

**Figure 5: Extracts describing the Narrabri Gas Project as a community 'taboo'.**

Importantly, the division within and across communities regarding the Narrabri Gas Project was cited by participants as an intentional move by the proponent to quell potential community resistance. Santos' alleged intentional suppression of community gatherings and discussions was raised by six participants. This is indicative of a consistent perception that the proponent has deliberately fractured social dynamics within Narrabri and surrounding communities in order to more easily progress their agenda. Participants made particular reference to the proponent's use of land buy outs and confidentiality clauses, as well as community donations and sponsorship, to both garner support and silence opposition. Most notably, two respondents described Santos officials isolating and, in their words, harassing vulnerable landowners (recent widows and young mothers respectively) in order to secure consent to access their property. In evaluating the impacts of the allegedly intended divisiveness of the Narrabri Gas Project, it is apparent that amongst the participants this has caused a fundamental mistrust of consent and consultation processes, and of both the proponent and the department's evaluations of community support for the project. This is shown in the extracts in figure 6.

*They then fed off - and this is not hearsay this is common knowledge they are guilty of trying to divide communities - they don't want to stand as a community they try to concur and divide.*

**Respondent #2**

*I remember receiving a phone call from a young mum who's not very far away from me who said 'I don't know what I've done, this guy turned up on my doorstep and you know was really convincing and he asked me to sign this document on the dotted line saying we allow him access'... She said, 'I had no idea what this was all about, and you know, my husband was away, I had a crying baby... how the hell do I get out of this'.*

**Respondent #3**

*The other thing they did is they picked vulnerable people. So we had 2 recently widowed ladies who'd lost their husbands and were still running the farm and still in stages of grief and they picked them first.*

**Respondent #2**

**Figure 6: Extracts alleging the intentionality behind the divisiveness of the Narrabri Gas Project.**

Another impact of the social fracturing of communities was the consistent observation from participants that the IPC determination was unlikely to put an end to existing social unrest. In particular, should the project be approved three of nine participants suggested that they themselves, and people they knew, would not stop actively resisting the development and that protests would likely escalate. Amongst these claims, it is important to note that the conviction with which participants described theirs and others intention to block the development was indicative of more expansive health and wellbeing concerns for the local community. Anecdotally, participants relayed an understanding that agricultural landowners in particular would rather face time in prison, or even death, than allow a Coal Seam Gas mine to operate on their property. As will be further detailed below, the mental health impacts of resource extraction in rural communities are well documented, and respondents in this study are similarly troubled by the possible implications of the project's approval for the health and wellbeing of those opposed. References to the potential for, and implications of, ongoing social unrest are shown in figure 7.

*It's just it's getting very very serious. I just I think that there will be a massive massive uprising if this is given permission to go ahead. In what form or shape I don't know.*

**Respondent #7**

*I can assure you nobody's going to change their mind. I know so many people who have invested so much, they may die doing it and I know a few that have done that too, but they won't change their minds.*

**Respondent #3**

*I've got a couple of old mates, now they're 10 years older than me so they're getting up around their late 70s and they said 'I would rather be shot than see my country destroyed by this industry*

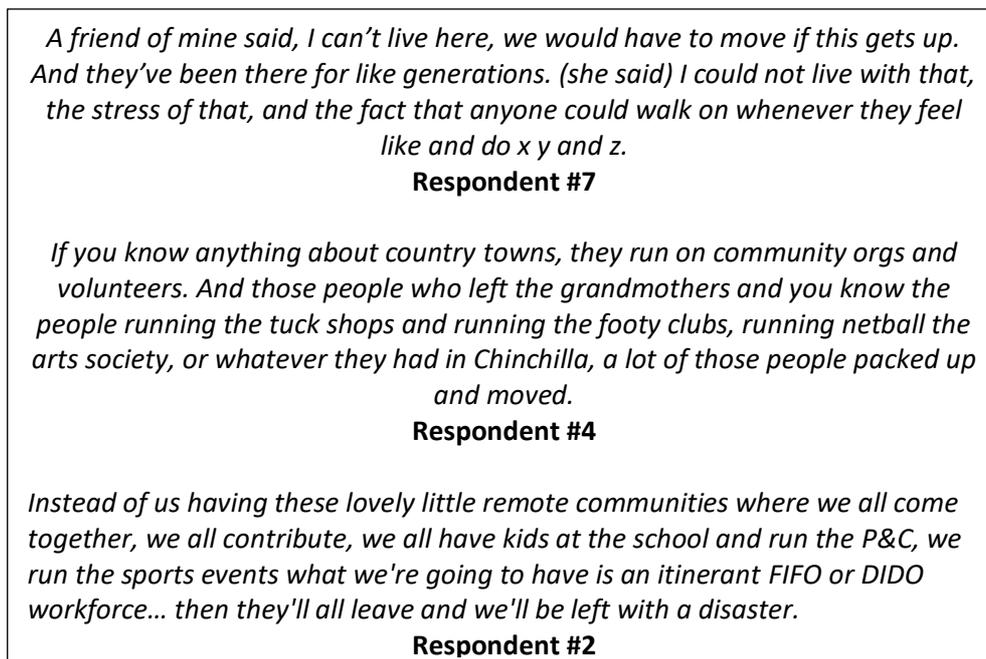
**Respondent #6**

**Figure 7: Extracts regarding the prospect of ongoing social unrest.**

The matter of community was also raised in relation to the shifting social fabric of Narrabri and surrounding regions. This was addressed in several ways, the first being the impact a state significant extraction project would have on existing socio-economic dynamics within the region. Three participants referred to shifts in housing and property prices, more specifically out of concern for vulnerable members of the community who would likely be priced out of the region should there be an influx of mine workers. This was also raised in reference to the boom and bust cycle associated with gas extraction, and four participants made direct comparisons to the experiences of communities in Queensland.

Impacts on existing social dynamics were also discussed with regards to community members choosing to leave the region for fear of a changing way of life and standard of living should the project be approved. One participant had already left the region as a direct result of the impacts of mining on land and communities. The concern that longstanding community members were either being bought out by mines or were choosing to leave due to prospective impacts of the development was raised by four participants. This has further implications for the cultural stability of the community. Respondents believe that outgoing residents would largely include older landowners and retirees who were essential contributors to the cultural life of the community. Volunteer run organisations such as the P&C, local cultural events and sporting activities rely on community investment and engagement. As one participant pointed out, given the transient nature of the incoming

mining workforce, these community events and organisations are unlikely to attract the same commitment from new residents. These concerns are explored in figure 8.



**Figure 8: Extracts concerning the implications of the changing social fabric of the community.**

Dr Askland has published extensively on the social impacts of resource extraction on small regional centres (see. Askland 2018; Askland & Bunn 2018; Farrugia et al. 2018). In reference to a case study of Wollar and the Peabody-owned Wilpinjong mine, Askland (2019) describes resource-based land acquisition as a process of dispossession and displacement resulting in the social and cultural 'death' of small rural communities. The connection to place and to people, which is the lifeblood of small towns and villages, is disrupted as individuals choose, or are forced, to leave.

As people have been bought out, those who remain in this remote village have become even more isolated. Life has become harder. People are aware of increasing risks and more concerned about their safety. Operating and maintaining the farms are more difficult and increasingly more expensive. (Askland 2018 p. 233)

Askland and Bunn (2018) go on to describe the disempowerment of individuals within small towns experiencing the detrimental effects of mining expansion, as the government overlooks rural villages in favour of prospective prosperity for larger regional centres.

Lastly, participants explored the shifting social and cultural structure of the community with regard to the impact of the incoming Fly in Fly out (FIFO) workforce. As noted above, an influx of mine workers to Narrabri and the surrounding regions has implications for the existing housing market, however that is principally regarding the approx. 50 operational workers Santos has identified as potentially relocating to the Narrabri region. Concerns regarding the FIFO workforce however are addressing the approx. 1300 construction jobs (principally employing young men) who will be housed in temporary accommodation near the development site. There were two key issues raised by participants with regards to the impacts of this workforce on the existing community. First, as transitory workers living outside of town and with no particular attachment to the community, participants saw it as questionable they would feel compelled to spend time or money at local establishments. Therefore, the claims of social and economic benefits particularly for smaller towns (other than Narrabri) are unlikely.

In addition, participants expressed concerns for Narrabri and other larger regional centres facing the social implications of hosting this FIFO workforce. One participant relayed their son's experiences of feeling unwilling or unable to visit pubs in Narrabri during periods with an increased FIFO workforce due to the discomfort brought about by a disparately young, male presence in the town. Literature identifies the masculinization of towns and communities as resulting in greater feelings of vulnerability for young women, higher instances of gender-based harassment and an increasing reluctance to engage in local social life than prior to the injection of a FIFO workforce (Lozeva and Marinova 2010; Shandro et al 2011). Dr Ziller (2020), in her review of the Narrabri Gas Project Social Impact Assessment identifies the gender imbalance as likely to trigger a number of social risks for both men and women within the Narrabri community, the initial impacts of which are already being experienced. These two iterations of impacts resulting from the incoming FIFO workforce are conveyed through the interviews in Figure 9.

*The mining community live in their own accommodation outside of town, they FIFO they don't support the town they don't live in town they only bring the problems to town*  
**Respondent #2**

*You put 500 men into a town, and you've got a local community with only a few local women and it's going to cause problems.*  
**Respondent #6**

*Those workers that come in, the social impacts of those guys when they've got their days off and they hit the pubs*  
**Respondent #7**

**Figure 9: Extracts describing the prospective impacts of an incoming FIFO workforce on the masculinization of the community.**

Interviews also revealed community concern regarding the mental and physical health impacts of the Narrabri Gas Project, both as they have already manifested and as anticipated should the project be approved. As has been relayed above, the development has already taken a significant toll on the participants interviewed for this research in the time and effort required both to protest the project and to attain a more accurate understanding of the prospective impacts. Six of nine participants, in relaying the experience of campaign fatigue, detailed experiencing significant stress and anxiety with regard to both the time they had lost to researching the project, and their fears for what would happen to themselves and their community in the eventuality that the Narrabri Gas Project is approved.

More broadly four of nine participants referred in some capacity to the mental health impacts of resource extraction on rural communities. Moffat and Baker (2013) demonstrate the particular vulnerability of farmers to the mental health impacts of resource extraction, in addition to the already documented risk indicators for rural communities. The experiences of farmers in Queensland proved particularly concerning to participants in this study, many of whom described witnessing first-hand the devastation to farming communities whose land and resources had been overtaken by Coal Seam Gas extraction. Askland and Bunn (2018) refer to the psychological damage associated with disrupted place attachment and community as a type of *solastalgia*, Solastalgia describes a feeling of loss, or pining, for places and environments in which one once felt a sense of attachment but which are no longer accessible or which have been transformed or destroyed (Albrecht 2005).

Interestingly, while the participants in this study had not yet experienced having their homes or land rendered inaccessible, the descriptions of dread in anticipating that loss have clear parallels to the experience of solastalgia. This was particularly evident amongst those who had invested significant time in investigating the possible impacts of resource extraction on their community. Extracts regarding the mental health impacts of the Narrabri Gas Project are shown in figure 10.

*I've got a couple of old mates, now they're 10 years older than me so they're getting up around their late 70s and they said 'I would rather be shot than see my country destroyed by this industry*  
**Respondent #6**

*And so, it's a huge amount of stress I suppose, sleepless nights of going omg what about this and what if this happens*  
**Respondent #4**

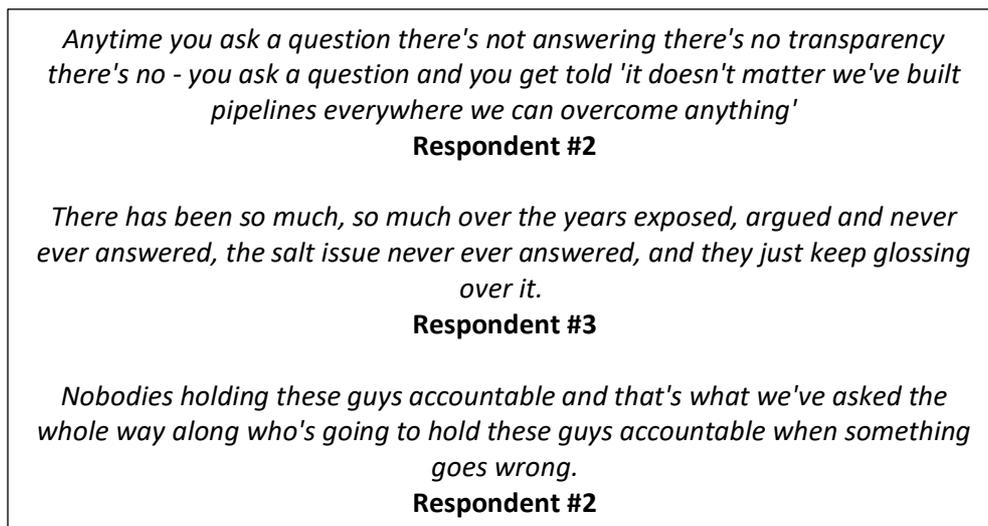
**Figure 10: Extracts describing the mental health impacts of the Narrabri Gas Project on participants.**

A finding of particular significance was that, when prompted, the only positive impact described by participants was the feeling of unity that emerged through collective anti-CSG mobilisation both within and across communities. As previously noted, six participants relayed the perception that Santos was intentionally dividing communities in order to garner support and, more significantly, suppress shared opposition. However, three participants also described positive experiences of coming together in their respective communities to form a united front against prospective developers. This was also explored in the opportunities to meet and form relationships with other individuals and groups protesting Coal Seam Gas resource extraction more broadly around Australia. The responses from participants here make clear that not only do they mistrust Santos' proposed benefits for the region, but that their only positive outcome from this development has been in the formation of community networks protesting the destructive practice of resource extraction in rural Australia.

#### 4.3) Built Environment

The next most significant issue for participants was the matter of built environment. Built environment according to the DPIE's Guidelines refers to problems regarding public domain,

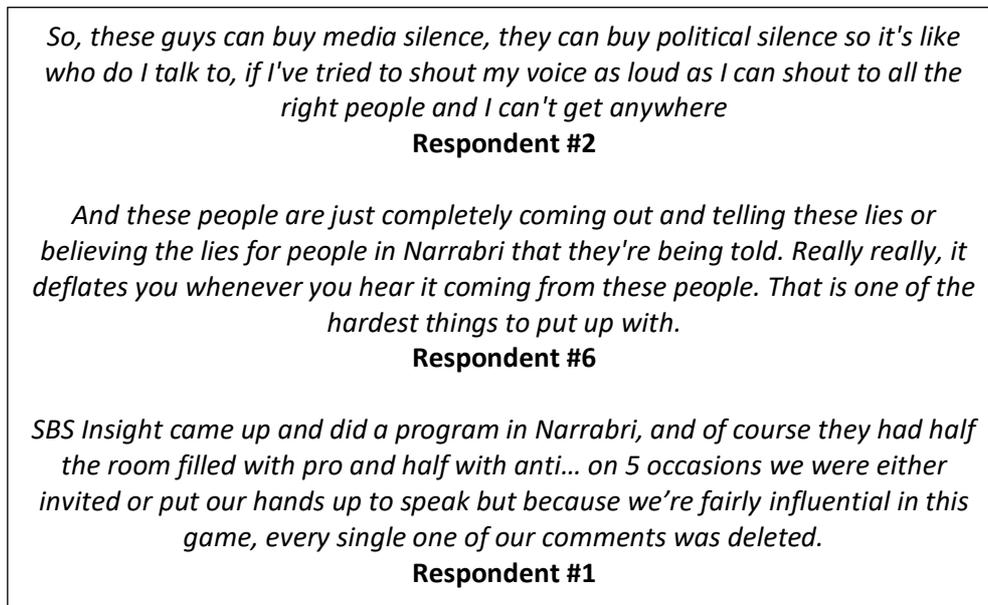
public infrastructure and other built assets. Within the context of the interviews analysed for this submission this most commonly referred to issues of mistrust in or lack of access to decision making systems associated with planning for the built environment. All nine participants framed the procedural structures surrounding the assessment and approval of the Narrabri Gas Project as illegitimate and untrustworthy. In particular, this was explored through the lack of observable accountability for the proponent to either meet their safety and community obligations or be held responsible for any failures to do so. Lack of accountability has been explored above regarding the issue of liability for landowners should there be any CSG related contamination of crops or livestock on their property. Here it is also evident in the perceived failure to adequately survey the community, properly evaluate the landscape and to engage meaningfully with locals on still unresolved issues that will likely impact their surroundings, livelihood and way of life should the project be approved. Concerns regarding Santos' accountability in keeping with department requirements are shown in figure 11.



**Figure 11: Extracts detailing the procedural failures in the built environment surrounding the Narrabri Gas Project.**

Concerns regarding the legitimacy of government decision making systems were also raised by participants on the issue of access. Participants described invalid and flawed community surveys, harassment and bullying from Santos officials and the suppression and/or immediate shut down of any attempts by anti-CSG campaigners to engage with both Santos and DPIE representatives during community consultation processes. All of this has contributed to a perception that the avenues of access to decision making systems for local communities have been intentionally undercut by both the proponent, and at times the

department itself, as can be seen in figure 12. Procedural justice describes the accessibility of political processes for those impacted by a project development (Pearsall & Pierce 2017; Walker 2009). Just practices include the right to fair and accurate representation, informed consent and active community participation in decision making processes. These are a necessity of best practice social impact assessments.



**Figure 12: Extracts describing issues of access to decision making systems.**

Finally, issues regarding the built environment surrounding the Narrabri Gas Project were explored in relation to the perception that, in supporting the development, local, state and federal politicians were valuing profit over people and prioritising the interests of mining companies over the risks to the community and to posterity. Participants were particularly concerned that politicians were overlooking the threat to groundwater which, given the current drought and reliance of the agricultural industry on water, is one of the most important resources available to the North-West. For these respondents, this is one of the clearest examples of a very real and encompassing community concern of the community being disregarded in the interest of pushing through the project's approval. This is because the messaging from the local community has consistently and overwhelmingly been that any threat to water must be considered unjustifiable or risk destroying both the agricultural industry and the very liveability of the North-West region entirely. Figure 13 shows extracts in which water is used to demonstrate the lack of government concerns for the interests of local communities.

*Anything that challenges underground water out here is lunacy because it's all we've got. That 3-year drought all the surface water is gone the rivers stop running it's all we've got. Don't even go there.*

**Respondent #3**

*Why would you risk something as sustainable as what we have with agriculture... the amazing amount of water we have in the Artesian basin, to risk it for something that is extremely dangerous, short lived and extremely expensive. There're no gains to be had and we've got everything to lose.*

**Respondent #6**

*The water one is, you know, without water we're stuffed, pure and simple. And I'm not saying it will say we won't have any water, but it certainly has the potential to compromise it big time.*

**Respondent #7**

**Figure 13: Extracts using water as an example of the unjust prioritisation of mining interests over communities.**

Procedural injustice impacts upon one's sense of self and perception of identity (Honneth 1992). To be denied the right to participation in decision making processes indicates that you are somehow less valued than those who are included. Interviews describe a devaluing of community welfare, contributing to the perception that mining interests are more deserving of procedural influence than those experiencing the social impacts. Askland and Bunn (2018) examined the impacts of large-scale land buyouts on the wellbeing of individuals and the community in Wollar, in light of the Peabody Wilpinjong mining development. They found that experiences of disempowerment and isolation that result from engaging with land acquisition processes reinforce the vulnerability and relative lack of say of communities, while paving the path for mining companies to continue these socially destructive cycles.

#### 4.4) Economic Impacts

Participants also conveyed a consistent concern for the economic security and stability of both their own livelihood, and of the region more broadly, should the Narrabri Gas Project be approved. A crucial issue was that of insurance, and the question of who would be liable for CSG related contamination particularly in instances where landowners are given no recourse but to permit developers access to their property. Insurance Australia Group (IAG), Australia's largest insurance company, has confirmed that they will no longer provide public

liability for farmers with Coal Seam Gas infrastructure on their property (Roberts 2020). This was most commonly questioned in the context of a pipeline development, with one participant being told by a representative of the proponent that the linear nature of the project meant landowners were unable to refuse land access despite the significant economic costs and risks of hosting the infrastructure. Three Participants described being unable to seek clarification with regard to liability despite the risks of contamination falling solely on the landowner. Interviews revealed two key issues in regard to insurance; first a fear for the viable longevity of farming businesses should the project be approved to operate on or around their property, and second in the perception of injustice that the proponent would not be held accountable for their faults by the government while the individual is left to bear the entirety of the costs. Concerns regarding insurance and public liability for CSG related contamination are shown in figure 14.

*So, it's leaking methane into the ground down here with things starting to die and then we end up with chemical contamination through plants or whatever and ultimately, I will bear the costs and I will not be covered legally.*  
**Respondent #2**

*The brokers gone all around the world he cannot get insurance, in other words there's no guarantee that ground water won't be contaminated.*  
**Respondent #4**

**Figure 14: Extracts discussing the issue of insurance and liability for landowners.**

More broadly, five participants referred to the shifting physical and social landscape in the face of resource extraction as a threat to the economic prosperity of the community. One participant was particularly concerned with the issue of resource extraction monopolising local skilled workers, resulting in small businesses having to downsize in order to operate with a reduced workforce. They went on to describe anecdotal circumstances in which prospective mine workers would undertake apprenticeships at local businesses, requiring extensive resourcing on the part of the employer, only to move to the mining industry upon completion. This was again observed to be intentional, with the respondent relaying alleged conversations in which mine workers had been told to undertake training elsewhere so that the proponent could avoid the task of upskilling their workforce. These practices destabilise local businesses, who have to compete with far higher salaried positions being offered to any trained workers in the local area. This also suggests that the proponent's commitment to providing jobs for the local community will in fact more likely result in said positions

being taken up by those employed elsewhere across the region who already have the requisite training to take on skilled positions. In turn, the implication that the resource extraction industry effectively poaches skilled workers from local businesses negates the proponents claims regarding benefits to Narrabri as the reported 95 new local jobs will not benefit those seeking employment and training within the local community.

#### 4.5) Threat to Regional Amenity

Throughout the interviews, concerns for the impacts of the Narrabri Gas Project on regional amenity were explored in two central ways: the prospective impacts to one's immediate way of life as a result of disruptions to surroundings, and through the mental and emotional impacts for participants grappling with the prospect of the changing face of the landscape. In the first instance, participants detailed issues regarding increased traffic, intrusive infrastructure, noise and smell, citing both their own experiences in Narrabri and other CSG mining regions as the basis for their concerns. Two participants also raised the privatisation and industrialisation of the Pilliga forest as interrupting the recreational amenity of Narrabri and the surrounding regions. These impacts are demonstrated in the extracts shown in figure 15.

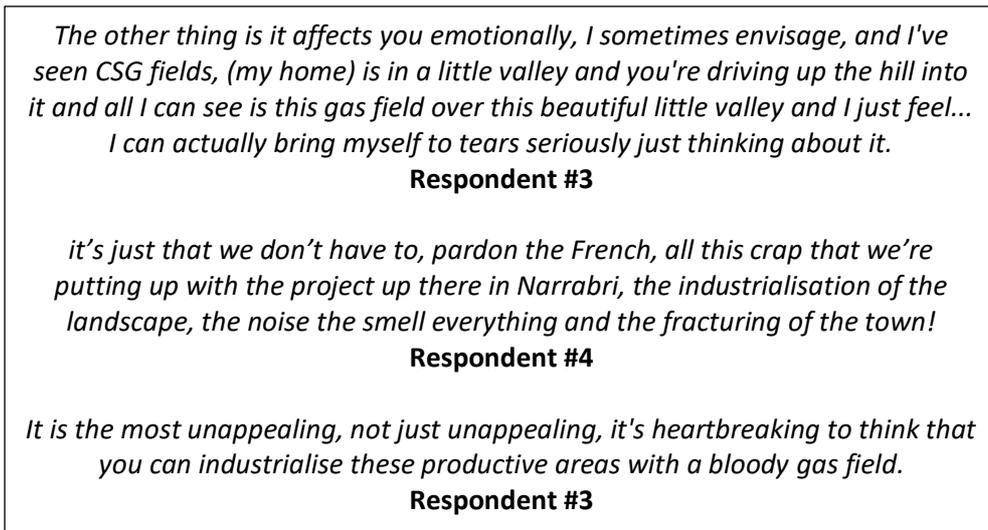
*I was a keen member of the Narrabri bushwalking club for example and we used to ramble all over the Pilliga, we then started going back into the Pilliga and finding areas were off limits, they were fenced off we couldn't go there.*  
**Respondent #4**

*And when they say the infrastructure is a small footprint, well is it really a small footprint and then go find out all of these things and what do you know when they were discussing pipelines they never mentioned any of the above ground infrastructure that goes with it. It's not a small footprint at all.*  
**Respondent #2**

**Figure 15: Extracts describing personal experiences of impacts to regional amenity.**

In addition, there was a recurring fear amongst the participants for the future of both Narrabri and the North-West region more broadly. Five participants directly referred to the industrialisation of the landscape as a key concern should the project be approved. This was accompanied by both frustration at the actions of the government and Santos, and by a strong sense of sadness at what stood to be lost. With regard to the social impacts of this experience, participants were not only concerned how their surroundings might affect them

directly, but how the culture and way of life within the region would be fundamentally altered should the environment and landscape be destroyed. This once again speaks to the experience of solastalgia, as participants feel the loss of the landscape even while the project has yet to be approved (Askland and Bunn 2018). The emotional impacts of the threat to regional amenity and surroundings are explored in the quotations shown in figure 16.



**Figure 16: Extracts demonstrating the emotionality in responses to the threat posed to regional amenity.**

#### 4.6) Questions of Access

Finally, four participants raised the question of who was provided access where, and when, specifically with regard to injustice in the extent to which Santos' interests were being prioritised over the community. The central focus of many of these claims was the publicly owned Pilliga State forest, in which two participants described confrontations with Santos officials over the right to move freely, un-accosted, in the forest and unobtrusively investigate the proponent's infrastructure. Participants also expressed enormous concern for the comparative rights of Santos officials to enter property without a signed agreement from the landowner. The contrast in access to the wider landscape, both publicly and privately owned, between the proponent and participants again strikes at the perception that the government has chosen to overlook the interests, fears and aspirations of the community in order to facilitate the development and expansion of the Coal Seam Gas industry. One participant even described fearing that should the pipeline be granted

permission to develop on their property it would not only bring unwanted intrusive and contaminated infrastructure, but that said infrastructure would then severely restrict the landowner's own access to large sections of their farming country. These concerns are explored in figure 17.

*So, we were looking at these sorts of things and as we left this facility and went on to look at others, a vehicle came out of there and followed us, and they followed us all the way out every time we stopped, they stopped.*

**Respondent #6**

*Very very worried that effectively those paddocks, I don't think we'll be able to crop them or take any heavy machinery on them and because it cuts our property in half.*

**Respondent #2**

**Figure 17: Extracts discussing the issue of unequal access and the prioritisation of mining interests.**

## 5) Conclusion

The findings of this research indicate that there are substantial personal and community impacts already being experienced by residents in Narrabri and the surrounding regions as a direct result of the Narrabri Gas Project. The findings are conveyed through the language of the NSW Department of Planning's (2017) Social Impact Guideline 'Checklist of Matters' in order to demonstrate the depth and breadth of these impacts that would only be exacerbated by the approval of the development. Some of the most significant findings are in the extent to which respondents had already lost time, both personally and professionally, to researching and seeking clarification as to how this project will impact the community. This is in addition to the broader impacts on the social, cultural and economic stability of the region, and the consistent reports from participants in this study that the development is a source of considerable community disruption.

All nine participants also felt that the processes surrounding the assessment and evaluations of the Narrabri Gas Project were unjustly biased towards the project's approval. Respondents demonstrated considerable mistrust in both the proponent and the government, with a consistent perception that mining interests were being prioritised over the welfare of local communities and the protection of regional and global environmental security. The experience of procedural injustice can have lasting impacts on one's sense of self and identity, and social impact literature has demonstrated the risks posed to the emotional wellbeing of communities in the face of displacement, and social and cultural disruption, from mining interests (Askland & Bunn 2018). The results of this study suggest the approval of the Narrabri Gas Project would not only exacerbate existing personal and community wide impacts, but create new more lasting issues across the region which may ultimately lead to a complete breakdown of the current social, cultural and economic way of life

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