

Submission to Independent Planning Commission

From: Rebecca Albury, 28 Highlands Pde, Bulli NSW 2516

Re: Objection to the Narrabri Gas Project

I object to the Gas Project for many reasons. I know that you have received many submissions from experts and concerned residents of NSW and elsewhere in Australia. I will not be providing extensive arguments but raising points for the Commission to consider when making its decision.

I am a retired academic with a professional interest in social policy and public policy making in general. I am also deeply interested in environmental issues and an activist against coal seam gas extraction and for protection of the wild places in Australia. I accept the science on global heating as the cause of climate change. Like many others, I want the generations to come to have a chance to enjoy the wild places we have known. I want them to know a world with a liveable climate, endemic animals and birds, extensive areas of native vegetation with active insect life. I think that the Narrabri Gas Project will not support this goal.

The Pilliga Forest is unique in many ways, It is the country of the Gamilaraay Nation. The forest is the sacred site, elders know the story the paths and areas of the forest tells. Already, the test wells are damaging the land and distressing the people. No amount of anthropology later can replace that damage. Furthermore, we have recently seen Rio Tinto pay for excellent research and then totally destroy the site. More recently we have heard that the company did not explain a less destructive and less profitable form of mining in the area. There is no reason to think that Santos would be different.

The Pilliga Forest is above the southern recharge area of the Great Artesian Basin. The Pilliga Sandstone that provides the filter for groundwater entering the basin has not been thoroughly studied for many reasons, but like the Indigenous sites, one reason is that no one or no team have had funding to produce the studies needed. Gas extraction at very deep levels has not been studied enough to provide strong evidence about the effects of drilling on the sandstone. In the Illawarra, sandstone on top of coal mines has been cracking with the use of long wall mining. Water that used to be available for the Sydney catchment has run away into mining tunnels. Sandstone is fragile - it is literally made of sand formed into a solid layer but the pressure of the earth above it though millions of years - the same millions of years that created the coal and gas that now lays beneath it. Have there been studies that show the effects of 850 holes being drilled through sandstone and then gas being extracted under pressure? If so what do they say?

In addition to the danger to the Great Artesian Basin, there is danger to the water tables used by farmers and towns nearby. The process of extracting gas produces truck loads of salty waste, often contaminated by other toxic minerals. There is no reliable plan to safely dispose of this waste. Already there have been spills and leaks of toxic water waste from the trial drilling. The forest dieback has not been remediated over the past seven years, trees are dying and with them the habitat of the many varieties of wildlife is becoming smaller. The waste from the trial sites is already killing the forest. Spills will potentially leach back into the local groundwater and poison farms and local towns. Australia is already dry, there is no social licence for poisoning groundwater. Stop this destruction now.

The many threatened species in the Pilliga are endangered by the destruction of the whole habitat - a major temperate forest in NSW will be broken into sections and criss crossed by roads and pipes. Small creatures will be unable to move around because they will not be able to cross the spaces. Traffic in the previously protective forest will be another killer. After the fires of the 2019-2020 fire season, wildlife are under great pressure already. Continued protection of the Pilliga Forest is essential for at least a decade or two.

When it comes to bushfires, a 1000 hectares containing 850 CSG wells seems reckless to say the least. Many wells have the equivalent of pilot lights burning regularly, adding carbon emissions to the atmosphere and danger to fire seasons. We have seen a fire season in which rainforests burned. Prolonged drought in a eucalypt forest is already a risk. Naked flames at regular intervals

raises the risk to a level that will be extremely dangerous for fire fighters, even firefighters in the air. Workers in the forest would also be in danger as would the rest of the Pilliga Forest and surrounding properties and towns. What is the Santos fire plan?

I am not an expert in economics, but I know that the prices of renewables are going down as is the price of gas. The ability to increase the reliability of renewables in times of high demand is rising. Fossil fuels are on the way out, not next week, but perhaps by 2040-2050. The Narrabri Gas Project may become a stranded asset before the projected life of the project. If so I would expect Santos to first ask for handouts or special deals from governments, and also to pull out without any remediation of the site. As prices go down, so does the inclination of large corporations to follow best practice or to be good neighbours. What is the plan for withdrawal from Narrabri?

I object to the Narrabri Gas Project because:

- * I care about the treatment of First Nations people - I note that even if the anthropology articulates the Gamilaraay stories to the satisfaction of non-indigenous experts, once approved the approval cannot be revoked;
- * I am very worried that the sources of clean water for vast areas of this dry continent would be put at risk for a short term project and a promise of a few jobs;
- * I want to give threatened species have a chance to survive this century of careless fossil fuel extraction;
- * I fear the outcome of bushfire, however started, in the Pilliga Forest. We can now imagine what it would look like as a result of the recent bushfires and the Beirut port explosion;
- * In this volatile time, how can the risk of the well field becoming a stranded asset and thus a further burden on the already stressed Australian economy;
- * I want Australia to be able to meet the Paris emissions targets.

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