



Oatley Flora & Fauna Conservation Society Inc.

Working to protect, conserve and enhance the natural environment
locally and globally, since 1955

NSW Government
Independent Planning Commission

Narrabri Gas Project

Dear Commissioners,

Oatley Flora and Fauna Conservation Society Inc objects to this proposal as it has the following concerns with respect to it:

Water

Removal of 1.5GL/yr of water by drilling 850 wells through Pilliga sandstone aquifer will depressurize underground water resources and threaten recharge of the Great Artesian Basin.

This in turn is likely to bring contaminated coal seam water to the surface. Elements absorbed by this water could leak into irrigation water in the aquifer and contaminate the Great Artesian Basin. This irrigation water is used for domestic, irrigation and stock purposes by local communities, who are opposed to the project.

Waste Disposal

Although Santos propose to treat water removed from under the Pilliga, this will result in very large quantities of waste containing heavy metals to be disposed of. Santos does not appear to have a plan to dispose of this highly polluted waste.

Fires caused by flaring waste gas in the highly flammable Pilliga landscape are also a serious concern, as highlighted by the RFS.

Environmental

This project will industrialise 95,000ha of the Pilliga forest, eastern Australia's largest temperate woodland by clearing, in small patches, nearly 1,000ha for infrastructure.

Limited surveys undertaken for project assessment found 10 threatened species and 85 threatened fauna, including pygmy Possums, Koalas and the Pilliga Mouse. This project will surely affect these and many other species in an unacceptable way by removing their habitat. Once a species home is destroyed, they are effectively executed.

Recent bushfires have already badly affected many species, including Koalas. This area is essential for their survival, particularly the Koala, whose fate is rapidly becoming problematical in NSW, and heading towards extinction in this area.

Birds will also be affected including the critically endangered Swift Parrot and the threatened Regent Honeyeater. Habitat loss and modification are contributing factors in the decline of both species. Protecting these two species will also benefit other threatened and declining woodland species.

In 2018 Society members toured the Pilliga and witnessed first-hand the defoliation of several hectares of native habitat resulting from fracking which will take many years (if ever) to remediate.

Aboriginal cultural heritage

90 Aboriginal cultural sites were identified in Santos' cultural heritage assessment of the project area in this significant Gomerioi landscape, including rock shelters, burials and historic camps and hearths.

Detailed surveys have not been carried out, but are proposed to be done by Santos after approval, and before infrastructure is built, avoiding new significant sites, but this could be too late to stop the gas field and its detrimental effect on these sites.

Greenhouse gases and climate change

Australia is finding it a challenge to meet its greenhouse emissions target under the Paris climate Agreement, and this gas field would increase its emissions by nearly 1%/yr by emitting 5 million tonnes per year, or a total for the life of the project of over 127 million tonnes.

Fugitive methane, with a greenhouse warming potential 21 times that of CO₂, released from the coal seams during the life of the project will also contribute greatly to our greenhouse emissions.

A UN report¹ has found that global gas production needs to peak by 2030 to achieve the Paris Climate Agreement goals of keeping global temperature from rising by more than 2°C. To keep this rise to 1.5°C, gas production should peak this year!

Australia should be planning now to reduce our production of gas, before long-lived infrastructure for gas production is constructed, locking us into gas production for another 20 years, way past its use by date.

Social and economic impacts

Very few people living in Queensland's gas fields thought that the industry has improved their lives, while a large proportion said that they were 'not coping' or 'just coping', according to CSIRO survey in 2014².

Fracking devastates local communities and impacts human health, e.g. in Tara, Qld:

<https://www.lockthegate.org.au/tara>

Santos itself has stated that there would be effects on housing affordability in Narrabri, particularly for indigenous people. Santos also claims that there will be many jobs created, both locally and state-wide, but these may be at the expense of other industries, as Santos admits, with losses in agriculture and manufacturing. Past experience has shown that these claims can be exaggerated.

Almost all gas produced in eastern Australia is exported via the LNG terminals at Gladstone. The small amount of expensively produced gas from the project will have negligible impact on domestic prices or supply.

In addition to the above, of the 16 recommendations made by the NSW Chief Scientist in 2014 to guard against the risks of coal seam gas, only 2 have been fully implemented, and half haven't been done at all.

Our Society therefore objects to this proposal and believes it should be rejected.

1. UN Environment Program's Production Gap Report in 2019
2. Walton, A., McCrea, R. and Leonard, R. (2014). CSIRO survey of community wellbeing and responding to change: Western Downs region in Queensland. CSIRO Technical report: CSIRO, Australia.