



Fossil Fool Bulletin

Fossil fools in the spotlight this week: A resource for people working to end the fossil fuel era in Australia

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Community challenges Santos' Narrabri gasfield approval

North West NSW farmers have launched an appeal against the NSW Independent Planning Commission's (IPC's) approval of the controversial Narrabri Gas Project.

In September, the IPC granted staged approval for the Santos-owned project, involving hundreds of CSG wells over a 95,000-hectare area near Narrabri.

The 25-year Narrabri Gas Project would contribute greenhouse gas emissions in the order of 127 million tonnes (CO₂ equivalent), at a time when the science says there is an urgent need for rapid emissions reductions.

Class 4 Judicial Review proceedings have now been lodged in the NSW Land and Environment Court by the Mullaley Gas and Pipeline Accord (MGPA), represented by Environmental Defenders Office (EDO).

If the judicial review is successful, the IPC will have to reconsider its approval of the gasfield.

MGPA is a group of around 100 residents and primary producer businesses from the town of Mullaley, south of Narrabri, and surrounding districts. The group are concerned about the Project's impacts on the climate, agriculture, natural resources and their lives and livelihoods.

The case broadly relates to two aspects of the IPC's decision on the Project. First, the failure of the IPC to consider the likely environmental impacts of the transmission pipeline which will be necessary for the Project to proceed,



and second the failure of the IPC to properly engage with the Greenhouse Gas Emissions from the project and their consequent impact on climate change and the environment.

EDO Director of Legal Strategy, Elaine Johnson says:

"Our clients will ask the court to find that the IPC erred in its decision making, including because it failed to properly assess the climate impacts from this project.

"For example, our client says that instead of looking at how the greenhouse gas emissions from the Narrabri Gas Project would contribute to global warming and worsening climate

impacts, the IPC looked at whether gas has an emissions advantage over coal.

"Further, our client alleges there was no evidence before the IPC that the Narrabri Gas Project would in fact displace coal as a source of electricity generation.

"Our client also argues that the IPC's consent does not include an assessment of the impacts of the transmission pipeline that will need to be built to get the gas to the east coast market.

"Our client will therefore ask the court to find that the approval for the Narrabri Gas Project is invalid."

Farmers overwhelmed with frustration

"I was overwhelmed with frustration that the IPC could let us down and let down Australia."

Mullaley sheep and cropping farmer and MGPA secretary Maddy Adams said, "We were appalled that the IPC did not consider the impacts of an external gas pipeline to transport gas from the project.

"We've already seen damage from other gas pipelines to soils in our region – we know how much of a threat they pose to farming soils and to water resources.

"There is no doubt that the Narrabri Gas Project and the climate impacts it will trigger are a huge issue that will affect so many communities, which has led to people from far and wide getting involved to prevent this project".

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• P2: Woodside gas expansion challenged

• P3: Morrison hands out \$50m to gas industry

P5: IPC greenlights another coal mine

Woodside gas project taken to Supreme Court by Conservation Council WA and EDO

The Conservation Council of Western Australia has begun a legal challenge in the Supreme Court to overturn environmental approvals which would allow billions of tons of carbon pollution from Woodside's proposed Burrup Hub LNG expansion.

Acting for the CCWA, the Environmental Defenders Office will allege that approvals given by the State Government to process gas, potentially including from the proposed Scarborough and Browse Basin gas fields, at the company's existing LNG facilities were given in contravention of the Environmental Protection Act, which requires Environmental Impact Assessment for any developments that would have a significant impact on the environment.

CCWA Director Piers Verstegen said the Burrup Hub was the most polluting fossil fuel project ever proposed in Australia and the CCWA was acting to prevent the release of billions of tons of carbon pollution and impacts to Aboriginal heritage values on the Burrup Peninsula.

"Approvals for processing vast amounts of new gas have been given in secret, with no environmental assessment and no consultation with the public or stakeholders. This includes new gas from the proposed giant Browse Basin and Scarborough offshore gas fields, as well as onshore resources which may require fracking to extract," he said.

"Documents released under Freedom of Information reveal that the impacts of pollution from processing the new gas – either on the climate or Murujuga rock art – were not assessed when the approvals were granted."

Secrecy and retrospective changes

The approvals were made by retrospectively changing the description of the Pluto and North West Shelf LNG processing facilities in the Ministerial Statements for these projects. These changes were made by the EPA Chairman at the request of Woodside.

"It defies belief that approvals have been secretly issued for one of the world's most polluting fossil fuel projects with no assessment of environmental impacts. By Woodside's



Burrup Hub LNG plant. Photo: Woodside

own numbers, these changes could allow gas processing that is estimated to produce around six billion tonnes of carbon pollution over the life of the Hub projects – roughly four times the pollution of the proposed Adani coal mine. The sheer scale of this pollution is staggering. It is equal to 35 new coal fired power stations every year until 2027," said Verstegen.

Environmental Defenders Office Managing Lawyer Tim Macknay said: "Our client has applied for judicial review of the EPA's decision to allow changes to approvals of two gas processing facilities without further assessment of environmental impacts of the changes."

"Due to the lack of assessment, the public now has no idea how much gas will be processed through these facilities, nor the overall amount of emissions likely to be facilitated by these projects," he said.

"We will argue the government made an error by not applying the correct test in deciding whether the changes might have environmental impacts requiring further assessments.

"Our client has engaged in good faith with the EPA and Woodside for over a year on this issue, and is now left with no choice but to apply to the Supreme Court in their stand for due process and transparency," said Macknay.

In addition to the carbon pollution, acid gas emissions from the gas processing are also damaging the

unique Murujuga rock art, through the corrosive effect on the surface of the globally unique petroglyphs.

"Six billion tons of carbon pollution and decades of acid gas emissions harming a World Heritage cultural site is a significant impact that should have triggered public assessment under State environmental laws," said Verstegen.

"WA is the only state where carbon pollution has risen substantially since 2005 due to rapidly rising pollution from the LNG export sector."

Earlier in December, the McGowan government was criticised by environmental groups for releasing a climate change policy that allows WA pollution to increase even further.

Woodside defends position

Woodside chief executive Peter Coleman said the company has complied with regulatory requirements and environmental processes.

"We intend to vigorously defend our position," he said via a statement.

"The CCWA is resorting to a legal challenge a year and a half after the approvals were granted.

"We strongly support the State Government's and the EPA processes."

Coleman said the legal action would cost taxpayers money, and flew in the face of the EPA's assessment.

Morrison hands out \$50m to prop up gas industry

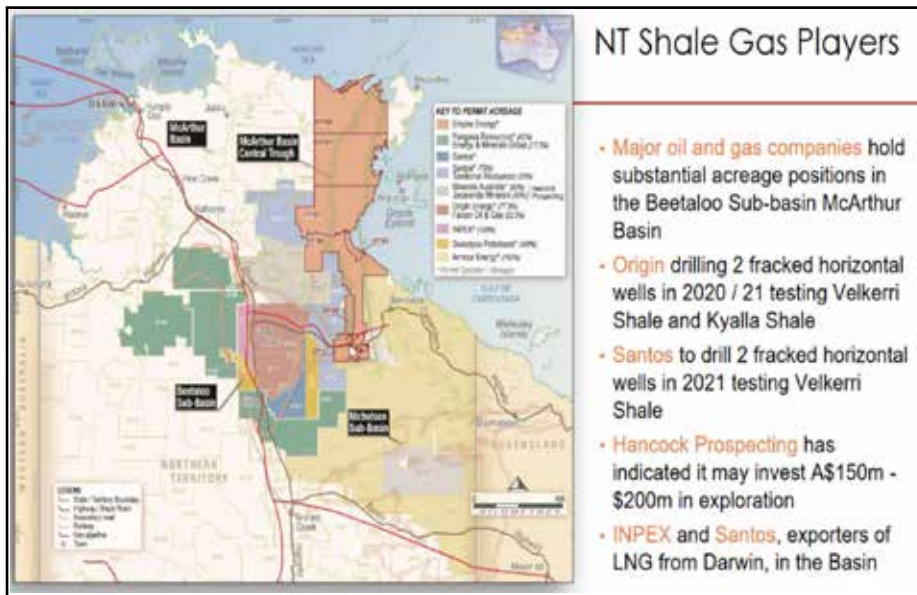


Image: Protect Country Alliance

The Morrison Government's appalling decision to spend \$50 million of Australian taxpayers' cash propping up the polluting gas fracking industry in the Northern Territory will threaten communities and the environment, and will damage other existing, more sustainable industries.

Protect Country Alliance spokesperson Graeme Sawyer said the decision by the Morrison Government was "an epic waste of precious public money".

"What this announcement clearly shows is that fracking the Beetaloo Basin for gas is not economically viable without massive subsidies," he said.

"Every Australian taxpayer should be utterly outraged by this decision – fracking is expensive, environmentally destructive, and has no future in a zero carbon world.

"The word is moving away from fossil fuels and renewable energy technology is now by far the cheapest, most efficient way to power homes and industry."

The European Commission recently proposed rules to restrict funding for LNG projects and instead funnel cash into low-carbon technologies to meet climate goals.

"Yet the dinosaurs in the Morrison Government remain ideologically in bed with the fracking industry and are

choosing to waste public money propping it up," Sawyer said.

"Put money into any other industry in Australia and you'll create more jobs.

"We know from other jurisdictions that when the fracking industry comes to town, it leads to a net decrease in job opportunities because it muscled out other industries and does not create the same jobs as, for example, agriculture."

Fracking costs jobs

When the fracking industry moved into Queensland, nine jobs were lost in the services sector for every 10 new CSG jobs, while 18 agricultural jobs were lost for every 10 people employed in the coal seam gas industry.

"Fracking also carries the serious and probable risk of contaminating and depleting underground water sources that are so vital in a dry country like ours," Sawyer said.

"To add insult to injury, the Federal Government is paying these companies to frack through our aquifers without waiting for the promised science studies into the groundwater to be completed.

"The Morrison Government can throw as much money as it wants at this destructive industry, but Traditional Owners, farmers, and the broader NT community remain opposed." **F**

Carbon capture is unproven and costly

Generating electricity by burning coal or gas and pumping the emissions underground is likely to cost at least six times more than electricity generated from wind power with battery storage, new analysis has found.

The analysis, by Associate Professor Bruce Mountain of the Victoria Energy Policy Centre at Victoria University, finds adding carbon capture and storage (CCS) – a key aspect of the federal government's technology roadmap – to electricity generation would:

- More than double the capital outlay for coal-fired power stations;
- Cost even more for gas generators than coal generators;
- Increase the cost of electricity by between \$90 and \$125 per megawatt hour.

"Our analysis suggests carbon capture and storage is likely to cost at least six times as much as wind generation plus storage, with comparable dispatchability," said Mountain.

"Making accurate cost estimates is not easy, as there are only two commercial-scale electricity generation projects using capture and storage in the world. One of those has already been mothballed and the second operates far below its design capacity.

"New technologies may reduce capture costs in future, but none of these technologies appear to be anywhere close to commercialisation."

Suzanne Harter, climate change campaigner at the Australian Conservation Foundation, which commissioned the analysis, said CCS was costly and unproven at scale.

"Carbon capture faces huge technological and geological challenges," Harter said.

"Minister Angus Taylor must not repurpose the Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA) and the Clean Energy Finance Corporation (CEFC) to add costly, unproven carbon capture and storage to their investment mandates." **F**

China's ban is less of a threat to Australia's coal industry than international climate ambition

By Tim Buckley, IEEFA

Australian coal exporters will survive this near-term political fight but there are long-term structural headwinds

The decision by China's National Development and Reform Commission to formally and indefinitely block Australian coal imports is a key threat to Australia's political and economic wellbeing. Australia can never expect to win a trade war with its biggest export partner, and it is sheer political and economic suicide to try to do so. But is it devastating for the Australian coal export industry? Not at all.

Far more strategically threatening in the long term for Australia and our coal industry is the pledge by China's president Xi Jinping to reach net zero emissions by 2060, which was rapidly followed by net zero emissions by 2050 pledges from Japan's prime minister Yoshihide Suga and South Korea's president Moon Jae-in. This series of sudden and powerful pledges of increased climate ambition by world leaders is likely to be terminal for our coal exports if we look out a couple of decades.

Mouse takes on elephant

Australia is caught in the geopolitical quandary of having China as our key trade partner and the United States as our key military ally. When US president Donald Trump started a trade war with China, it was never going to turn out well for Australia. And incoming president Joe Biden is unlikely to change tack too materially where China and trade and technology are concerned (whereas on climate, Biden's arrival changes everything). But we in Australia are like a mouse caught in the middle of two sparring elephants.

In business, the best rule is that the customer is always right (even if they are not). Our coal exporters will however survive this near-term political fight, probably far better than our wine or lobster export industries, by comparison.

There are no coal ships destined for China being loaded in Australia now. For most industries, that would be devastating. For coal, not so much. In fact, a look at the share prices

of Whitehaven Coal and New Hope Corporation would suggest quite the opposite. Since the September 2020 trough, and acknowledging the sharp price falls on Tuesday, Whitehaven shares have rallied 70% and New Hope are up almost 20%.

Why? Coal is coal, at least to a finance analyst like me, if not an engineer. Australia sells the vast majority of its coal to Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. And if China buys more Russian, South African and Indonesian coal to replace Australian coal, then we can, by and large, simply swap customers, maybe with a month's disruption. Total demand doesn't change, nor does supply – at least not in the near term. Sure, there are some boiler and blending constraints, but notwithstanding coal luddite claims that Australia's coal is slightly less carbon polluting than someone else's seaborne coal, the minute difference is irrelevant – all coal is almost 100% more carbon intensive than wind, solar, hydro, nuclear or energy efficiency. Or green ammonia, as Japan's JERA is now thinking.

The coal industry is actually benefiting from a near-term relief rally. In September Australian coal exporters were losing money with every tonne of coal they exported. In December, the picture is very different. China's key Shanxi province has just shut down coal production near term due to a spate of deadly accidents, just as winter heating demand has kicked in.

Meanwhile the Chinese industrial economy is powering along. So the Chinese domestic thermal coal price

has jumped 35% to 740/t yuan in the last three months. Seaborne thermal coal prices have rallied from a low of US\$46/t to over US\$70/t in the same timeframe. Even as total volume of Australian coal exports have dropped in the December quarter, the value has surged, and more importantly, the profitability much more so (notwithstanding the 10% rally in the Aus\$/US\$, lifted by the unprecedented rally in iron ore prices). Hence the Whitehaven Coal and New Hope increase in share price.

The coal export sector outlook seems profitable again – in the near term. But the 25% collapse in the Dalrymple Bay Coal Terminal share price since its initial public offering last week is a clearer perspective of the longterm structural headwinds Australia's coal industry is facing. Far better for our Hunter Valley, La Trobe Valley and Bowen Basin communities that we as a nation acknowledge the science of climate change, prepare a national roadmap, ideally with a destination and time of arrival clearly acknowledged.

The investment, employment and export opportunities for Australia are enormous, and exciting. To steal a very good line from Ross Garnaut and Mike Cannon-Brookes – better we focus on building Australia as a renewable energy superpower.

• *This commentary first appeared in The Guardian.*

• *Tim Buckley is the director of energy finance studies at IEEFA*



WA gov't supports gasfield before approvals

Lock the Gate is calling on the WA McGowan Government and companies behind the Waitsia Gas Project Stage 2 to rule out fracking after joint owners Mitsui and Beach Energy announced their final investment decision on December 24.

Bizarrely, and despite outstanding environment approvals, the McGowan Government issued a press release saying it had "executed arrangements to support the Waitsia Gas Project Stage 2 proceeding to construction".

Lock the Gate Alliance WA Mid West Coordinator Simone van Hattem said, "What is the point of an environmental assessment process when pro-gas governments announce dodgy deals have been done on Christmas Eve to support a project that does not even have final approval yet?"

"Local landholders remain deeply sceptical of company claims that the gas they seek is 'conventional' because, based on McGowan Government policy, there is nothing to stop Mitsui and Beach fracking."



Whitehaven guilty

Whitehaven Coal pleaded guilty to all 19 charges brought against it by the NSW Resources Regulator in the Land and Environment Court on December 12.

Whitehaven illegally bulldozed tracts of land to create unauthorised roads, failed to rehabilitate drill sites, and illegally drilled boreholes.

Each charge carries a maximum penalty of \$1.1 million, and Bogabri Farmer Sally Hunter said she hoped the company would finally get the wake-up call it needed to stop its destructive illegal behaviour in north west NSW.

“This is a big deal – Whitehaven has never faced a penalty of this magnitude before, and we desperately hope this bad corporate citizen and repeat offender learns its lesson.”

“We hope the Court recognises the significance of the offences and that Whitehaven receives fines that reflect the community’s absolute outrage over this company’s illegal behaviour.

“Even more galling is the fact that Whitehaven continues to seek approvals for new expansions and new mines in the Namoi Valley.

“Whitehaven has a terrible track record in the Namoi. It repeatedly outbid farmers for water during the height of the drought. Whitehaven has also been fined for allowing toxic blast fumes to drift over neighbouring properties, polluting air and water, illegally dumping waste, illegally clearing bushland, and committing worker safety breaches.

“This latest matter also makes it the sixth time Whitehaven has been taken to court over issues at its north west coal mines.

“Whitehaven bizarrely tried to avoid prosecution earlier this week, in part by offering to donate \$50,000 to the mining industry’s propaganda arm, the NSW Minerals Council.

“Thankfully the NSW Resources Regulator rejected Whitehaven’s strange proposal.”

The penalties, potentially up to \$20 million, had not been announced when FFB was published.

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Sporting figure joins LTG board

Lock the Gate Alliance has welcomed former Wallabies Rugby Union team captain David Pocock to its board of directors.

Chair of the national Lock the Gate board Simon Clough said he was delighted with the appointment, and pointed to Pocock’s passion for sustainable agriculture and backing for farmers and Traditional Owners working to protect land and water.

“Much of Australia’s farmland and environment is under threat from coal and gas exploitation. We have invited David to join the board of directors due to his tenacity for helping protect these special places,” Clough said.

David Pocock said, “Lock the Gate Alliance has helped build a grassroots movement to support regional communities as they stand up against coal and gas projects that threaten their natural, cultural and agricultural resources.

I have been inspired by their work and look forward to joining the board and finding ways to contribute.

“At a time of so much change across the country, it’s more important than ever that we invest in the future, ensuring the benefits are felt in regional communities.”

“It’s increasingly clear that the risks coal and gas developments pose to farmland, sacred sites, our climate and environment are not worth it – coal and gas have had their day. We need to make bolder, smarter choices that build a better future for rural Australia.”

Pocock and his wife Emma Palandri have also written a book, called “In Our Nature”, which chronicles the couple’s conservation and farming work, including their involvement in the Leard Blockade.

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IPC greenlights another coal mine

The NSW Independent Planning Commission’s appalling decision to greenlight the damaging Maxwell Underground coal mine in the Hunter Valley is further evidence the authority now exists solely to rubber stamp controversial projects for the NSW Government and Planning Department.

The coal mine, located near Jerrys Plains, will compromise strategic farmland, will reduce base flow to the Hunter River, and will be responsible for about 377 million tonnes of CO2 emissions over its lifespan.

During the IPC hearing, commissioners heard from owners of world renowned horse studs and vineyards who feared the mine would have a severely disruptive impact on their businesses.

This is now the sixth mining project the IPC has waved through since raising the wrath of the NSW Minerals Council post Justice Preston’s decision that the Rocky Hill coal mine should not proceed on climate change grounds.

“The public have effectively lost faith in the IPC’s ability to assess controversial mining projects with an impartial eye since Planning Minister Rob Stokes kneecapped the authority following the rejection of the Bylong Valley

mine,” said Lock the Gate Alliance NSW coordinator Georgina Woods.

“Merits appeal rights for those who oppose these projects are unavailable so without an independent umpire, people and industries that are affected by mining have effectively got no say and no protection.

“Clearly, Minister Stokes has stripped the IPC of its independence. It is now little more than an extension of the NSW Government and Planning Department, that rubber stamps anything that comes its way.

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A gas-led apocalypse – photo essay

North West Protection Advocacy has published a compelling photo essay on the gas industry.

“We must question the human rights abuses that are happening on the Western Darling Downs in south-west Queensland. Is this the kind of future in store for north-west NSW?”

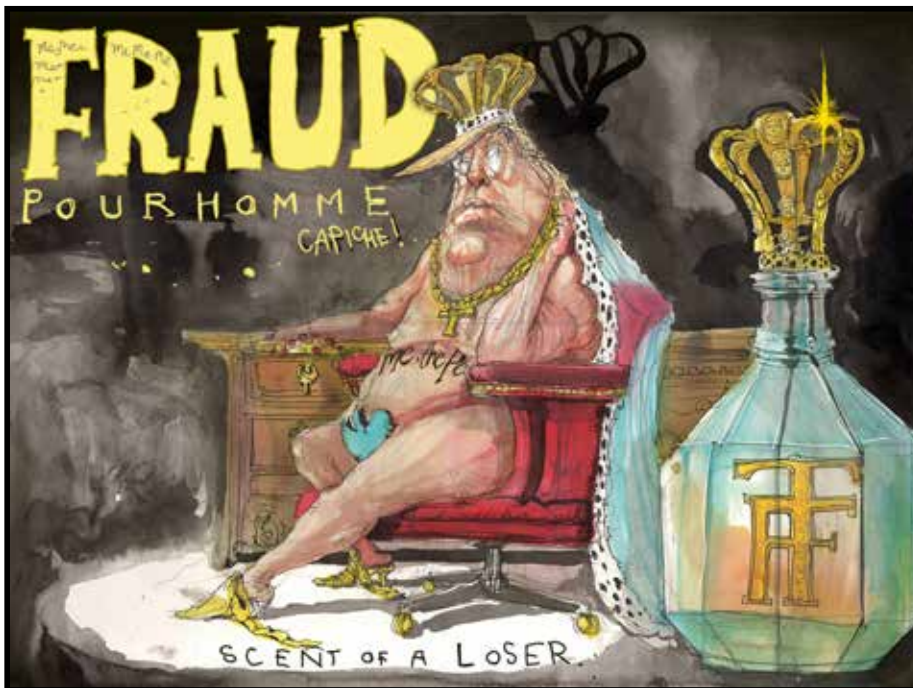
Shadow places are everywhere but rarely made visible. NWPA present a photo essay of a place that has surely been consumed by shadow,” the organisation says.

• See the essay here:

<https://nwprotectionadvocacy.com/a-gas-led-apocalypse-is-underway-in-a-shadow-place-a-photo-essay/>

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David Rowe reproduced with permission: <https://www.facebook.com/david.rowe.5070>



Community protects itself with baseline air monitors

Bundaberg locals worried about the potential future impact of a planned coal mine have achieved what is believed to be a first for any Queensland community group and installed baseline air monitoring devices.

Avondale resident of 31 years Penny Taylor said far from preparing for the construction of the mine, the establishment of the air monitors was a way for the local Bundaberg Protectors Group to show proponent Fox Resources how serious they were about fighting the proposal.

"I think it will intimidate Fox Resources because it will show the company how deadly serious we are," she said.

"We are going to have so much data that will prove just how little pollution there is around Avondale.

"The community is absolutely serious and there is no way Fox Resources will get its mine – it is just not going to happen."

Gladstone Conservation Council co-ordinator Anna Hitchcock said coal mines were well known for producing harmful particulate matter that impacted people's health.

"As far as I know, this is the first community in Queensland to start doing baseline air quality monitoring before a fossil fuel project has been approved."

Two monitors have been installed so far – in Bundaberg city and at Avondale – and the Bundaberg Protectors Group has plans to install several more.

Data publicly accessible

The air monitors, which are manufactured in the USA, are unique in that their data is available online in a publicly accessible worldwide network.

The monitors take continuous measurements of dust and fine particles which are harmful to human health.

• Data from the monitors can be viewed at:

<https://www.purpleair.com/map?opt=1/i/mPM25/a60/cC1#8/-24.9/152.779>

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THE ADANI SAGA

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-12-16/future-fund-invests-millions-in-adani-project/12984734>

Australia's Future Fund 'in bed with Adani' after freedom of information request reveals \$3.2 million investment

Michael Slezak, ABC, 16/12/2020

More than \$3 million of Australian taxpayers' money has been invested in a crucial Adani company-funded rail link from the controversial Carmichael coal mine to a port on the Great Barrier Reef, the ABC can reveal.

Documents requested under freedom of information laws by the Australian Centre for International Justice and shared with the ABC reveal the \$3.2 million investment in shares by the Future Fund — the \$60.5 billion fund set up in 2006 to create returns for the Australian Government.

It comes after the same Adani company — Adani Ports and Special Economic Zones (Adani Ports) — was criticised by the UN for business arrangements that financially support the Myanmar military, which stands accused of the “gravest” crimes against humanity under international law, including genocide.

In 2019, activists were causing difficulties for Adani negotiating a contract with rail companies to haul coal from its mine to the coast for export.

In September, the ABC revealed Adani had created its own rail haulage business, Bowen Rail Company, to counter that and move coal to the port.

Despite Bowen Rail Company not publicly mentioning Adani, it is entirely owned by Adani Ports.

That linked the Adani subsidiary directly to the Carmichael mine for the first time, making it a major target for activists.

In a letter to Future Fund chairman and former Australian treasurer Peter Costello dated November 23, Australian Conservation Foundation boss Kelly O'Shanassy said the shareholding in Adani Ports — revealed by the FOI — meant the Australian public “may be financing key operations of the Carmichael coal mine”.

She wrote this was not only “environmentally unjustifiable”, but also presented reputational and financial risks for the Future Fund in light of the decade-long public campaign against the mine and increasing divestment from coal.

“The Future Fund would be wise to heed the warnings about the Carmichael mine and review its investment in Adani Ports,” she wrote.

BREAKING: AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT INVESTS TAXPAYERS' MONEY IN ADANI'S CARMICHAEL COAL PROJECT



Meme: Stop Adani, Facebook

“We urge you to remove this equity holding from the Future Fund's portfolio.”

The Future Fund is far from alone in investing in Adani Ports, which is a highly profitable part of the Adani Group, with groups such as Allianz and HSBC also investing.

The Future Fund's investment in Adani Ports has also been criticised by human rights lawyers at the Australian Centre for International Justice (ACIJ), following revelations about the company's business relationship with the Myanmar military.

Ms Arraf described the Myanmar military's reign as a “campaign of terror” against Rohingya villages, resulting in serious crimes such as mass killings, torture and rape as well as allegations of genocide.

Adani Ports was singled out in a report by the United Nations from August 2019, investigating business connections between the Myanmar military and other countries and businesses.

COAL ROCKS ON

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-12-16/china-defends-reported-coal-ban-against-australia/12987604>

China accuses Australia of playing the victim and politicising trade, says coal ban is 'responsible act'

ABC, 16/12/2020

China has defended its alleged ban on Australian coal as both legal and good for Chinese consumers and companies, accusing Australia of playing the victim as the fraught relationship continues to deteriorate.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison described the reported ban as a «lose-lose situation» and said he was seeking clarification from the Chinese Government.

He said China would be in breach of World Trade Organization rules as well as a bilateral free trade agreement if it banned Australian coal.

Morrison was responding to a report that the Chinese National Development and Reform Commission had given power plants approval to import coal without restrictions except for Australian coal.

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Coal and iron ore are Australia's most lucrative exports and China is Australia's biggest trading partner, taking \$13.7 billion worth of metallurgical and thermal coal in 2019.

But Australian exports to China appear to have suffered due to deteriorating bilateral relations since Australia called for an independent inquiry into the coronavirus pandemic.

Australian products including wine, lobster, beef, barley and timber have also been affected this year.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-12-16/agl-million-dollar-penalty-for-polluting-hunter-valley-creek/12986750>

AGL issued \$1 million penalty by Environment Protection Authority after ash waste pollutes Hunter Valley creek

Ben Millington, ABC, 16/12/2020

Energy giant AGL will be forced to spend more than \$1 million on community projects and rectification works after one of its ageing coal-fired power stations polluted a creek in the New South Wales Hunter Valley.

It is believed to be the largest form of penalty ever enforced by the state's Environment Protection Authority (EPA) on a power station.

The incident occurred at the Bayswater power plant near Muswellbrook when a pressurised pipeline carrying coal ash waste burst due to internal corrosion.

The rupture occurred on September 4, 2019 at 1:00am, but went undetected for eight hours.

Several warning systems were not properly configured or functioning, and one alarm, which crucially measured the rate of flow, had been turned off.

A total of 1,440 cubic metres of ash waste, enough to fill more than half an Olympic swimming pool, was released into a dry creek bed.

Coal ash, the by-product of burning coal for power, contains concentrated levels of heavy metals and is mixed with water to create a slurry before it is stored in large containment waste dams.

The EPA and AGL have now entered into what is called an Enforceable Undertaking (EU) agreement, which requires AGL to pay a total of \$1.1 million.

Around half will go towards local community environment projects and the remainder will be spent on rectification work on the pipeline and industry training.

AGL has also rehabilitated the Bayswater Creek at a cost of \$320,000.

Since February 2015, AGL's Bayswater plant has recorded 52 non-compliances with its licence conditions, including two previous occasions when the ash pipeline failed or ruptured.

The site has also been issued with seven penalty notices since 2015.



AGL's Bayswater Power Station and ash waste dam in the NSW Hunter Valley.

Photo: Hunter Community Environment Centre

Jocelyn McGarity, a lawyer with Environment Justice Australia, welcomed the size of the EU, but said AGL should have faced criminal prosecution.

"AGL's compliance history is quite significant and so understandably community and environmental groups feel a bit disheartened that they've managed to enter into an agreement with the regulator, rather than the regulator showing some teeth and taking AGL to court," she said.

"One of the ways that you can affect deterrence for polluters to be held to account is through prosecution and these alleged offences are criminal environmental offences.

"It's worth nothing that it doesn't appear that the EPA has ever successfully prosecuted AGL for an environmental offence, despite AGL's compliance record."

The operation and the maintenance of the Bayswater ash pipeline has been contracted to TW Power Services since 2016.

But integrity issues and internal corrosion with the pipeline were first identified by AGL when it bought the power station from the state government in 2014.

Since then, implementing a solution has been much-discussed between AGL and the EPA, but ultimately none has been implemented until now.

Paul Winn, from the Hunter Community Environment Centre, which focuses on coal ash pollution, said it points to slipping standards at ageing power stations.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-12-17/bluewaters-coal-fired-power-station-written-off-books/12990532>

Bluewaters coal-fired power station written off as worthless as renewables rise

Daniel Mercer, ABC, 17/12/2020

The owners of Australia's newest coal-fired power station have written down the value of the asset to zero, wiping out a \$1.2 billion investment in the face of an onslaught of renewable energy.

In what a financial market analyst said was a "classic example" of changes predicted in the energy industry, Japanese conglomerate Sumitomo has written off its \$250 million equity stake in the Bluewaters power plant in Western Australia's south-west.

It comes just nine years after Sumitomo, in a joint venture with fellow Japanese firm Kansai, bought Bluewaters for a reported \$1.2 billion from the wreckage of fallen coal tycoon Ric Stowe's failed business empire.

Kansai is believed to have made similar accounting changes, meaning both companies have reduced their equity stakes to zero.

The Institute of Energy Economics and Financial Analysis, a think tank funded by environmental philanthropists, said Sumitomo had been left with little choice other than to write off its investment in Bluewaters.

Simon Nicholas, an energy finance analyst at IEEFA, said the decision was important in a global context because it highlighted the extraordinary changes underway in energy.

In a sign of these pressures, the WA Government announced a pricing trial aimed at encouraging households to soak up the soaring amounts of solar power flooding on to the grid during the middle of the day.

<https://www.afr.com/companies/energy/planning-battle-weighs-on-agl-in-lng-import-race-20201216-p56nv3>

Planning battle weighs on AGL in LNG import race

Angela Macdonald-Smith, AFR, 17/12/2020

AGL Energy has failed to establish the need for its LNG import terminal in Victoria, has inadequately considered Aboriginal cultural values of the site and has not provided enough information to fully assess its potential environmental impact, an independent panel assessing the controversial project has been told.

The 38 days of hearings, which will conclude on Thursday with AGL's final submission.

sions, are part of an extended assessment of the \$300 million Crib Point project that has seen AGL fall behind rivals proposing similar import projects

<https://www.smh.com.au/environment/climate-change/energy-giant-loses-bylong-coal-mine-appeal-in-win-for-anti-coal-groups-20201218-p56gorq.html>

Energy giant loses Bylong coal mine appeal in win for anti-coal groups

Peter Hannam, SMH, 18/12/2020

The NSW Land and Environment Court has upheld a decision by the state's Independent Planning Commission to reject a controversial coal mine planned for rich farmland north-west of Sydney.

Korean energy giant KEPCO had been seeking to overturn the decision in September 2019 to reject a proposed coal mine for the Bylong Valley because of "long-lasting environmental, agricultural and heritage impacts".

The court's decision to dismiss the appeal was welcomed by farmers and other groups opposed to a new open-cut mine in the farming region near Mudgee.

The Bylong Valley Protection Alliance – set up by the local community – had to step in to defend the decision in court after the commission opted not to back its own verdict.

"This court decision reaffirms what we locals always knew – that the IPC was right when it ruled the agricultural values of this valley are too precious to sacrifice for the sake of a temporary, destructive coal mine," Phillip Kennedy, the alliance's president, said.

"The soils in this valley are classed as the top 3.5% in the state. There's no way it should ever have been made available for mining by the government."

A spokesman for KEPCO Bylong said the company was "very disappointed that the court did not find in favour of the project and the strong case it made for overturning the refusal by the [IPC]."

"KEPCO will now take some time to review the decision of the court and decide the future direction of the project," he said.

Rana Koroglu, managing lawyer for the Environmental Defenders Office in NSW which acted for the alliance, said the local community had fought for five years to save their valley.

"The community provided robust scientific evidence to the IPC on the detrimental environmental, social and economic impacts of the proposal to build a new coal mine in a highly productive agricultural area," she said.

Mr Kennedy said the NSW Berejiklian should permanently bar mining in the Bylong Valley, and protect its farming through legislation.

"We also call on KEPCO to sell the 30,000 acres it bought in the valley back to the people so this region can once again be the

strong farming community it used to be," he said.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-12-22/nsw-planning-commission-approves-coal-mine-at-jerrys-plains/13002806>

NSW approves coal mine at Jerrys Plains despite protests from nearby horse stud farms

Jake Lapham, ABC, 22/12/2020

The Independent Planning Commission (IPC) in New South Wales has approved a proposed underground coal mine in the state's Hunter Valley, a week after China placed a ban on Australian imports.

Malabar Resources was seeking approval to mine 148 million tonnes of coal for the next 26 years at Jerrys Plains near Muswellbrook.

The proposal attracted intense opposition from the Hunter Thoroughbred Breeders Association (HTBA), which claimed it would threaten the viability of the world-famous Coolmore and Godolphin horse stud farms nearby.

"We're extremely disappointed and very concerned still about the consequences that this mine would have on water, air, the effects of blasting, even whether the economics of this mine stack up," HTBA president Cameron Collins said.

Malabar chairman Wayne Seabrook said the project could co-exist with the equine industry by using infrastructure built by nearby open-cut mines.

Friends of the Upper Hunter secretary Kirsty O'Connell said the decision was an example of the planning system failing locals.

"I think the residents of the Upper Hunter are rightly questioning at what point the NSW Government and the IPC will take our wellbeing and our concerns seriously," she said.

Joel Fitzgibbon, the federal Labor MP for Hunter, welcomed the decision.

The mine is predicted to produce 337 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions over its 26-year life, but the commission concluded they could be minimised through underground storage of gases and reuse, and that such emissions were "acceptable and consistent with the public interest".

OIL & GAS LEAKS

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-12-07/geelong-oil-refinery-viva-energy-lng-gas-terminal/12957168>

International support for plan to expand Viva Energy's Geelong oil refinery to LNG terminal

Nicole Mills, ABC, 07/12/2020

It has been part of the Geelong skyline for 66 years but the future of the Corio refinery looks uncertain.

Viva Energy, which operates the site, is reviewing the viability of its refining busi-

ness after revealing it recorded "unsustainable" losses of almost \$50 million in the first half of 2020.

But today a glimmer of hope emerged for the plant, and its 700 employees, with Viva announcing it had signed a memorandum of understanding with three major energy companies — ENGIE Australia and New Zealand, Vitol and VTTI — as well as global trading and investment company Mitsui.

The agreement will see the consortiums work together on plans to develop an LNG gas terminal at the site, as well as look at long-term plans to create an energy hub, which could include solar, gas, hydrogen manufacturing and other renewable and lower carbon energy sources.

<https://narrabricourier.com.au/2020/12/08/1-billion-spend-on-gas-project-across-five-years/>

\$1 billion spend on gas project across five years

Narrabri Courier, 08/12/2020

Santos managing director and chief executive officer Kevin Gallagher told guests at the Mayor's Christmas Party in Narrabri on Friday night that Santos proposed the expenditure of more than one billion dollars on the Narrabri gas project over the next five years.

"We have already commenced workover activities on our existing wells in October," he told guests.

"And during the appraisal phase of the project that will start early in the new year, there will be plenty of opportunities for local businesses as we invest around \$120 million over the next two years – a great boost for local suppliers, local trades and local jobs.

"We already employ 18 people who live and work locally – and one of the things I am passionate about is that all our operations people will live and work locally throughout the project – they will not be FIFO workers."

"And I am very pleased that Santos has entered into a \$14.5 million Voluntary Planning Agreement with the Narrabri Shire Council which will deliver an upgraded Narrabri Airport, better local roads, more development of the sports and tourism precinct and improvements for the Country Universities Centre."

<http://www.mpnews.com.au/2020/12/15/art-works-to-help-save-western-port/>

Art works to help 'save' Western Port

Mornington Peninsula News, 15/12/2020

In a jubilant moment last week organisers of the fundraising exhibition Art is in Our Nature met with members of the Save Westernport committee to hand over \$87,000 raised from their campaign in October.

The handover took place at Woolley's Beach at Crib Point, the site of AGL's proposed gas import terminal.

The online exhibition was hosted by Silver Leaf Art Box and Merricks General Wine Store. Exhibition curator Penelope Gebhardt said, "The exceptional calibre and generosity of artists wanting to be involved, and the keen supporters of the exhibition, highlight the steadfast and widespread opposition to a gas terminal in the internationally significant waters of Western Port."

The groups have been fighting the proposal for three years based on what they say is its "unacceptable threat to the rich ecological environment of Western Port and the climate more broadly".

Fifty-four artists participated in the online exhibition from a mixture of local, Melbourne, rural Victoria and interstate locations.

Landscape painter Mary Tonkin described Western Port as a "fragile ecosystem of sea meadows and mangroves" that was home to weedy sea dragons, Australian fur seals, southern right whales, little penguins and migratory birds.

She said it was "no place for a dirty fossil fuel industry".

Save Westernport president Candy van Rood said the money raised by the art sale would pay for expert witnesses and the legal team from Environmental Justice Australia,

"They are representing the joint environmental groups Save Westernport, Victoria National Parks Association and Environment Victoria and our community in the current environmental effects statement hearings."

The money would also go towards the groups' summer campaigns, including a "big paddle out in January", van Rood said.

The EES hearings are in their 10th and final week and can be seen live at engage.vic.gov.au/crib-point-IAC

<https://inql.com.au/business/2020/12/17/lng-prices-gutted-but-gladstone-exceeds-production-capacity/>

LNG prices 'gutted' but Gladstone exceeds production capacity

John McCarthy, In Queensland, 17/12/2020

Gladstone's three LNG projects have exceeded their combined nameplate capacity in November for the first time since they started in 2015.

Export volumes are booming but analyst EnergyQuest said prices "have been gutted".

"In March, just eight months ago, total LNG export revenue was \$4.4 billion. By September it was down to \$1.8 billion," EnergyQuest's latest report said.

East coast projects again shipped a record 2.126 Mt (32 cargoes) in November, eclipsing the record set in October of 2.050 Mt. The east coast projects operated at 102% of nameplate capacity during November.

Significantly, China is a major investor in LNG and it is crucial to its energy supply so it is not facing the bans other commodities like coal were having to deal with.

East coast gas-use for generation was well down, by 2.07 PJ (-21%) on a year earlier and 0.96 PJ lower compared with October, being replaced by solar and wind generation.

According to EnergyQuest, while Gladstone has been going at full strength, Queensland had to import gas from other states in November.

Net gas flows to Queensland from other states were 3.7 petajoules in November.

EnergyQuest said CSG production from fields operated by the LNG producers was 121.2 PJ in November, down slightly from 122.6 PJ in October and 6.2 PJ below exports including fuel gas.

"Total Australian exports for the year to November are running 1.2 million tonnes ahead of the same period last year and EnergyQuest expects that total exports for the year could reach a new record of 78 Mt, up on the 77.5 Mt exported in 2019," EnergyQuest said.

<https://www.theland.com.au/story/7058545/council-takes-a-unanimous-stand-against-zombie-pels/>

Liverpool Plains Shire Council votes against coal seam gas and to extinguish zombie PELs

Billy Jupp, The Land, 17/12/2020

Liverpool Plains Shire Council has voted to take a stand against expired petroleum exploration licenses.

Councillors unanimously voted to oppose coal seam gas and request expired Petroleum Exploration Licences 1,12 and 452, which cover the area, be extinguished.

The council also voted to acknowledge that the NSW Planning system does not provide satisfactory consideration of the environmental and economic costs to the community from coal seam gas exploration and development.

The motions come after local landholders lobbied the council in November to follow the lead of councils such as Moree Plains and Dubbo, which took similar stances on the zombie PELs earlier in the year.

Quirindi landholder Peter Wills said it was a landmark moment for the shire.

<https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/news/politics/2020/12/19/fracking-country-the-nt/160829640010913>

Fracking on Country in the NT

Rick Morton, Saturday Paper, 19/12/2020

About 900 kilometres south-east of Darwin, hidden in the tropical savanna woodland of the McArthur River region, there is a sacred site, on Gundanji Country, somewhere off the Carpentaria Highway.

This land has been returned to traditional owners. Only they know how to find the site. The last seven kilometres must be covered on foot: there are no tracks.

Rikki Dank's people are a matriarchal group and the most senior traditional owners are her grandmothers, Katie Baker and

Peggy Lawson. In Gundanji law, Dank has been nominated as Baker's jungkayi or jungai, which gives her the responsibility of talking for the land, especially sacred sites.

It is a privilege she takes seriously. Much of the Country she calls home is part of the Mermaid's Dreaming. Here, as the Dreaming story goes, the travelling ladies, or mermaids, have come down from the coastal waters.

But this connection is now threatened. In September, the Empire Energy Group Limited announced to the Australian Stock Exchange that it had "mobilised" a 27-metre-tall Schlumberger land rig to a site on Dank's Country, over which the company has exploration permits.

"My grandmother was out bush one day and just rocked up and has seen all of these trucks," says Dank. "She's in her mid-80s. You can imagine how stressful it was for her to see so many people and so much machinery on her Country."

The drill site, known as Carpentaria-1, is located just 30 kilometres from the sacred site.

Carpentaria-1 is the latest development in the gas rush in the Beetaloo Basin, which was spurred on by the Northern Territory Labor government ending a moratorium on fracking in 2018. It has been kicked into overdrive by the federal Coalition's push for a "gas-fired" economic recovery from Covid-19.

Less than a fortnight after the federal government released its delayed budget in October, the federal minister for Energy and Emissions Reduction, Angus Taylor, visited the Empire Energy drill site.

He was spruiking \$28.3 million in federal funding to "unlock and accelerate the development of vast gas reserves".

Until now, Rikki Dank and her family have chosen not to talk publicly about fracking. Her grandmother's discovery of the massive drilling rig changed that.

"Before we realised Empire had their eyes on our place, we've been on the sideline working and quietly supporting the others because all of the fracking has been happening on their Country," she says.

"We don't want to step out of line in terms of cultural protocol and speak for anyone because they have their own voices. But now it feels like we have to be included in this fight."

<https://www.smh.com.au/business/companies/former-fire-fighters-blow-whistle-on-disaster-waiting-to-happen-at-chevron-s-gorgon-project-20201124-p56hhv.html>

Former firefighters blow whistle on 'disaster waiting to happen' at Chevron's Gorgon project

Hamish Hastie, SMH, 22/12/2020

Chevron's Barrow Island emergency services team was once considered one of the best private firefighting forces in the country.

Collectively, the tight-knit group of former military and professional firefighters from around the country had hundreds of years of experience under their belts to match the serious dangers Chevron's \$54 billion Gorgon facility on the island, 60 kilometres off Western Australia's Pilbara coast, could pose if something went wrong as it processed millions of tonnes of pressurised and highly flammable gas each year.

But over the past year a new contract between Chevron and its Barrow Island private emergency services contractor Parabellum International removed the requirement for professional firefighting experience for new emergency services officers, known as ESOs.

Now at least half of those skilled staff have either resigned or were made redundant and been replaced with cheaper staff with no real-world firefighting experience as both companies pursue cuts to wage bills and other costs in the face of falling energy prices.

Speaking on the condition of anonymity over fears of being blacklisted in their small industry, five former Parabellum employees, who have detailed knowledge of the plant's emergency services operations, have blown the whistle on what they believe is a "disaster" waiting to happen.

The former employees said the situation had become so bad that new staff were being hired with no firefighting or hazardous materials experience and, despite job ads for Parabellum requiring new hires to have a truck licence and certificate III in firefighting, they didn't even have those.

<https://inql.com.au/business/2020/12/21/shell-pockets-3-2-billion-in-sell-off-of-gladstone-gas-infrastructure/>

Shell pockets \$3.2 billion in sell-off of Gladstone gas infrastructure

John McCarthy, In Queensland, 21/12/2020

Shell QGC has offloaded a 26.25% stake in its Curtis Island LNG common facilities to Global Infrastructure Partners Australia for \$US2.5 billion (\$A3.29 billion).

It follows \$US9 billion writedowns of its Australian gas assets earlier this year.

It said the common facilities were currently 100% owned by Shell and include LNG storage tanks, jetties and operations infrastructure that service QCLNG's LNG trains. Upon completion of the transaction, Shell will remain the majority owner and operator of the common facilities.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-12-21/woodside-faces-burrup-gas-fight-amid-rock-art-pollution-fears/13003532>

Woodside faces challenge over Burrup Hub LNG plans amid pollution and rock art fears

David Webster, ABC, 22/12/2020

Conservationists are seeking to overturn approvals for Woodside's proposed Burrup Hub LNG expansion in WA, warning it could unleash billions of tonnes of carbon pollution and endanger ancient rock art.

The Conservation Council WA is targeting the approvals to process gas from the Scarborough and Browse fields at the Burrup in the WA Supreme Court.

The Council's executive director Piers Verstegen said there had not been a proper public assessment.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/dec/23/farmers-launch-legal-challenge-against-approval-of-36bn-narrabri-gas-project>

Farmers launch legal challenge against approval of \$3.6bn Narrabri gas project

Lisa Cox, Guardian, 23/12/2020

Farmers in north-west NSW have launched a legal challenge against a decision by state authorities to approve the controversial \$3.6bn Narrabri gas project.

The farmers, from community group the Mullaley Gas and Pipeline Accord, will argue that the NSW Independent Planning Commission did not properly assess the effects the gas field would have on climate change before approving the plan to drill up to 850 wells in grazing land and forest in the state's north.

The farmers are calling on the state and federal governments to order Santos to cease any exploratory work while the legal appeal is underway.

A spokesman for the Independent Planning Commission confirmed the commission had been served papers for the judicial review but said it would not be commenting further at this stage.

CLIMATE CRISIS

<https://www.smh.com.au/environment/climate-change/hob-carr-pens-global-letter-that-highlights-government-s-resistance-to-climate-change-20201216-p56a2l.html>

Bob Carr pens global letter that highlights government's resistance to climate change

Nick O'Malley, SMH, 17/12/2020

Former foreign affairs minister Bob Carr has written to about 70 international government contacts in Europe, Asia, the Pacific and inside US President-elect Joseph Biden's transition team to highlight what he calls the Australian government's "strong resistance" to action on climate change.

Carr's letter comes as the government seeks international support for former finance minister Mathias Cormann's bid to be made the next chief of the Paris-based Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

In his letter Carr outlines the government's proposed inquiry that would grill financial regulators and banks over their plans to pull back on lending to or insuring mining projects because of climate change, championed by Coalition climate sceptic George Christensen.

Carr writes that Australia is the only developed nation in the world that does not have a net zero 2050 goal and that, "it now

seems Australia will also become the only developed country in which corporations cleaving to the international consensus on climate will be 'roughed up' in the Australian Parliament.

Other prominent business leaders have also expressed concern about Cormann's OECD bid due to the government's climate record.

Jillian Broadbent, a former board member of the Reserve Bank and chair of the Clean Energy Finance Corporation, said she was concerned about the nomination because the OECD has been a leading proponent of international co-operation on climate change.

"We are proposing an Australian candidate who has resisted any move for Australia to be more progressive in this space. I have a concern that if he takes on this role the OECD will not drive this issue as much as it should," she said.

In regards to the inquiry she said the federal government was resisting efforts by the corporate and financial sectors to read and respond to market demands regarding climate change.

The former advertising boss and Howard government adviser Geoff Cousins said that Cormann and the Australian government should withdraw from the OECD campaign.

"It's a race he can never win ... it's just a waste of everybody's time and significant amounts of taxpayers money to fly him around Europe and wherever to try and get a job that he isn't going to get."

While the Australian Labor Party has backed Cormann's bid, the British Labour Party has called on the nation's Conservative Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, to boycott the campaign.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-12-21/electricity-prices-expected-to-fall-as-renewable-supply-increase/12999538>

Electricity prices predicted to fall as renewable supply increases, gas price falls

ABC, 21/12/2020

Household electricity bills are expected to fall by 9% (averaging \$120 per household) over the next three years as more renewable generation joins the grid.

A new report by the Australian Energy Market Commission (AEMC) predicts all states in the National Electricity Market — NSW, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia and Tasmania — will have lower energy prices in 2023.

The report says the main reason for the drop is lower gas prices and the introduction of new sources of energy generation like solar and wind.

It also says network costs and environmental costs are falling, too, although they contribute less to the overall reduction.

"What's really driving that across the national electricity market is ... new supply entering the market making downward

pressure on the cost of producing electricity, but also due to gas prices flowing through into those wholesale energy costs.”

FOSSIL POLITICS

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-12-10/australia-excluded-from-global-climate-meeting-as-policies-lag>

Australia excluded from global climate talks as policies lag

Jason Scott & Jess Shankleman, Bloomberg, 11/12/2020

Around 70 world leaders including China's Xi Jinping and Pope Francis will use a global climate summit this weekend to outline new pledges to cut greenhouse-gas emissions. Australia's Prime Minister Scott Morrison, who supports fossil fuels, will be conspicuously absent.

Morrison wasn't invited to speak at the United Nations Climate Action Summit on Saturday because he hadn't come up with an ambitious enough pledge, according to two people familiar with the matter. The summit marks the fifth anniversary of the Paris Agreement to limit global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius -- a target which the world has yet to achieve.

As a prerequisite for speaking, leaders had to provide a guidance note setting out what they would announce. Recent months have seen major emitters including China, South Korea and Japan commit to stop polluting completely by 2060 or sooner. The European Union is debating a target to cut carbon emissions 55% or more by the end of the next decade. Notable in their absence from the list is Australia, Brazil, Saudi Arabia, Mexico, Turkey and Poland. The US government will not be represented since current President Donald Trump has pulled out of the Paris deal, but the governors of Massachusetts and Michigan will be attending.

Morrison has spent the year promoting the role of Australia's oil and natural gas exports in pulling the country out of the pandemic-induced recession.

The summit organizers' decision to exclude Morrison suggests his conservative government's continued support for the fossil-fuel industry, which reaps A\$120 billion (\$90 billion) in exports a year, is increasingly unpalatable on the world stage.

Morrison's ongoing backing of fossil fuels comes despite a groundswell of support from Australians to take tougher action to reduce emissions during the unprecedented bushfire crisis that swathed the nation's major cities with toxic smoke a year ago. The months-long blazes, which scientists said were exacerbated by climate change, burnt an area the size of the UK, killed 33 people and caused more than A\$10 billion of damage.

<https://www.northerndailyleader.com.au/story/7051944/prehistoric-marshall-slams-barnaby-joyces-anti-renewables-lobbying/>

Adam Marshall slams Barnaby Joyce for lobbying against local renewables

Andrew Messenger, Northern Daily Leader, 14/12/2020

Barnaby Joyce's state counterpart – a Nationals Cabinet Minister – slammed his opposition to new renewable energy in his electorate as “banal and binary and prehistoric” on Friday.

The Federal MP last month told the Leader he would lobby the Commonwealth against the legislated zone, which he said will turn his electorate into a “sea of wind farms”.

“It's irresponsible as an MP to oppose a project that actually has the support and acceptance of the community, like the New England Solar Farm outside Uralla,” Marshall said.

“The largest in Australia, and it has the support of the community.

“We're talking about billions of dollars of investment. We're talking about hundreds and hundreds of jobs. Why would you oppose that if the community supports it?”

State government plans accommodate for as much as 8,000 megawatts of wind, solar and battery power in the region; development worth as much as \$12.7 billion.

Joyce said existing proposals for renewables development were already generating backlash across the region, with opposition groups emerging in Ben Lomond, Nundle and Kentucky, among other towns.

“If you want to have this argument about renewables as bad and you've got to have coal, it's a ridiculously banal and binary and prehistoric argument. It's not one or the other. We have both now and we're going to continue to have both for a very long time.

“The market will always continue to go for the cheapest source of energy. It will be the private sector not governments that decide when those coal fired power stations close their doors for the last time.”

<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/frydenberg-backs-probe-into-banks-not-lending-due-to-climate-risks-20201215-p56noo.html>

Frydenberg backs probe into banks not lending due to climate risks

Rob Harris & Shane Wright, SMH, 16/12/2020

Federal Treasurer Josh Frydenberg has thrown his support behind a proposed inquiry that will grill financial regulators and banks over plans to pull back on lending or insuring mining projects because of climate change.

Big banks including the ANZ, which has ruled out financing any new coal mines or coal-fired power stations and asked its biggest clients to provide plans to decarbonise, are expected to be hauled in front of the parliamentary probe to be chaired by

Coalition climate sceptic George Christensen.

The Australian Prudential Regulation Authority and Australian Securities and Investments Commission, both under Frydenberg's portfolio, are also expected to be asked to attend hearings, after they directed financial institutions to better consider the financial risks of climate change and international shifts away from fossil fuels.

The government's decision to support such an inquiry has raised eyebrows of several inner-city Liberal MPs in Sydney and Melbourne, who would not comment on the record on Tuesday ahead of a ministerial reshuffle this week.

But one MP said under the condition of anonymity: “It has the potential to reaffirm every suspicion they have about us and play to every stereotype. If banks are weighing up the risks of lending to fossil fuels, I'm not sure we should be stepping in.”

Oliver Yates, a climate activist and banker who was unsuccessful in his attempts to unseat the Treasurer in May last year, said the link between the burning of fossil fuels and climate change is clear.

“The link between higher temperatures and damage to property is clear. The link between property damage and compensations claims is clear. Any sensible bank or insurance company would be reducing its exposure to these risks. It is just good business practice,” Yates said.

The Reserve Bank has also noted that “climate change is exposing financial institutions and the financial system” to risks that will rise over time if not addressed.

Pitt said this week that mining services businesses, engineers, ports and small firms connected to coal mining were “having trouble firstly getting insurance if they work in the resources sector and secondly, finance”.

“Now I don't think that should continue,” Pitt told the ABC. “The International Energy Agency still says there'll be very large demand for coal. Australia's coal is a very high quality product – it will continue to be that way.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/dec/16/the-morrison-government-subsidising-dirty-fuel-amid-the-climate-crisis-beggars-belief>

The Morrison government subsidising dirty fuel amid the climate crisis beggars belief

Bill Hare, Guardian, 16/12/2020

The announcement this week by energy minister Angus Taylor that he's putting together a major package to prop up oil refineries to preserve dirty fuel supplies to one of the dirtiest car fleets on the planet simply beggars belief.

This week, we've seen king tides and storms hitting the country's eastern coastline, changing the face of much-

loved Aussie beaches, which were already feeling the effects of rising sea levels. This time last year, the country was on fire. In 2020 our Great Barrier reef was bleached for the third time in five years, the most widespread event ever. We just had the warmest spring ever, 2C above average, which would have been “virtually impossible” without our greenhouse gas emissions.

The transport sector is the third largest source of emissions in the Australian economy, after electricity and industry.

Australia is one of the few countries in the world with no emissions nor fuel efficiency standards for light duty vehicles. The government has given no indication of any intention of introducing them, despite five years of deliberations in the ministerial forum on vehicle emissions.

And it gets worse. Australia’s fuel quality is amongst the worst in the OECD with high sulphur content at levels banned in the EU ten years ago. Last year the government allowed this to continue to 2027. One consequence, apart from health effects, is that many very efficient internal combustion engine vehicles that can only run on low sulphur premium unleaded will not be sold in Australia.

Taylor seems to be wilfully ignoring Australia’s huge transport emissions problem.

The Australian fleet of 19.2 million vehicles is one of the world’s most polluting and least efficient, far behind the US, China, Japan, India and the European Union.

The Climate Action Tracker has modelled a Paris agreement-aligned benchmark for Australian transport, which would require Australia to increase its share of electric (or emissions-free) vehicles in new vehicle sales from less than 1% today for personal cars to 95% in 2030, reaching 100% in 2035. This would translate into roughly 38% EV share in the total fleet in 2030 and a full decarbonisation of this fleet by mid-century.

EVs would require more electricity, and also when integrated with a modern grid providing important grid services. Tapping into the vast renewables resources available in Australia and getting the country onto a 1.5C Paris agreement compatible pathway would not only provide the renewable energy for an EV network, it would also provide literally tens of thousands of jobs for Australians, far more than the ones Taylor is seeking to protect with his fuel package.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-12-16/wa-government-power-market-trial-to-protect-grid/12986348>

WA electricity prices would be slashed during the day, doubled during peak under new Government trial

Daniel Mercer, ABC, 16/12/2020

Electricity prices would be slashed by more than two thirds during the middle of the day under a trial aimed at encouraging households to soak up excess solar power

flooding into Western Australia’s biggest grid.

- Customers will pay 8 cents per kilowatt hour between 9:00am and 3:00pm;
- That increases to 55 cents per kilowatt hour between 3:00pm and 9:00pm.

But customers would face paying almost twice as much for their power at peak times in the evening, as the State Government tries to shore up supplies and reduce costs in the system.

There are now more than 300,000 solar installations — or 30% of households — on the state’s main power grid.

The number of installations could almost double by 2030.

The trial involves 400 customers of State-owned electricity provider Synergy.

Opposition energy spokesman David Honey labelled the changes bad policy, arguing time-of-use tariffs tended to disadvantage poorer households while benefiting wealthier ones.

<https://www.themercury.com.au/news/national/morrison-govt-chips-in-50m-to-speed-up-beetaloo-development-by-two-years/news-story/3e70378a092c751e1d881ddd16ecac07>

Morrison Govt chips in \$50m to speed up Beetaloo development by two years

Gary Shipway, NT News, 16/12/2020

The federal government is putting \$50m on the table to speed up gas exploration and development in the NT’s Beetaloo sub-basin 600km south of Darwin.

The funding will be put towards exploration that occurs before June 2022.

Resources, Water and Northern Australia Minister Keith Pitt said the funding would accelerate exploration and production in the Beetaloo by about two years.

“The funding will fast track drilling by providing grants to cover 25% of eligible exploration costs, capped at \$7.5m per well and three wells per exploration venture.

“The Beetaloo Basin has been described as the ‘hottest play on the planet’ with the potential to be a world-class gas resource, transform the Northern Territory economy and generate 6000 jobs by 2040.

CLP NT Senator Sam McMahon said the strategy was focused on unlocking the full potential of the Beetaloo, which the Morrison government had given top priority to as the first of five strategic basin plans earmarked for delivery to spearhead a gas-fired recovery for Australia.

<https://www.afr.com/companies/energy/explorers-line-up-for-50m-beetaloo-drilling-funds-20201217-p5609a>

Explorers line up for \$50m Beetaloo drilling funds

Angela Macdonald-Smith, AFR, 17/12/2020

Origin Energy and Santos look set to tap \$50 million of funding controversially announced by the federal government to accelerate exploration and production from

the gas-rich Beetaloo Basin in the Northern Territory by two years.

Juniors including Empire Energy, Tamboran Resources and Falcon Oil & Gas are also on the likely list of applicants for a 25% subsidy on the cost of exploration work carried out in the highly prospective region by mid-2022.

The funding, which was attacked by anti-gas groups as propping up a dangerous industry, is capped at \$7.5 million per well and three wells per exploration venture.

The funding is part of the Morrison government’s agenda for a gas-fired recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, which singled out the Beetaloo region among five “strategic basins” to be prioritised for early production. Most analysts expect any commercial production from the basin would only start in the second half of the decade.

Activist group Lock the Gate Alliance branded the federal government’s move as “appalling”, claiming that the fracking supported by taxpayers’ funds would “threaten communities and the environment”.

“What this announcement clearly shows is that fracking the Beetaloo Basin for gas is not economically viable without massive subsidies,” said Graeme Sawyer from Protect Country Alliance, which involves several Indigenous and environmental groups, including Lock the Gate.

Meanwhile, lawyers for AGL Energy have slammed deliberate misinformation campaigns run by interest groups on social media to stoke opposition to its \$300 million LNG import terminal in Victoria, saying they interfered with the environmental approval process.

The “inflammatory rhetoric and jargon” shared to generate large numbers of objections to the Crib Point terminal diverted attention away from the factual information made public, Chris Townshend, counsel for AGL, told the panel assessing the controversial project.

Environment Victoria campaigns manager Nicholas Aberle took issue with AGL’s arguments, noting “almost unanimous” opposition to the project.

“These accusations are a blatant attempt to divert attention away from the very serious information exposed during the inquiry, which raises serious concerns about this project’s impacts on the community and environment,” Dr Aberle said.

<https://inqld.com.au/news/2020/12/15/mining-lobby-spent-almost-400000-trying-to-hold-back-the-greens/>

Mining lobby spent almost \$400,000 trying to hold back the Greens

Sean Parnell, In Queensland, 15/12/2020

After calling for a vote against the Greens, the Queensland Resources Council was forced to register as a third party at the state election.

The lobby group, headed by former federal Liberal frontbencher Ian Macfar-

lane, has now disclosed \$388,972.91 in campaign-related expenditure. Its overtly political approach led several mining companies to sever ties, and forced the resources council to meet tougher transparency requirements with the Electoral Commission of Queensland.

The Greens gained a second seat in parliament at the election, and built its vote in several south-east Queensland electorates. In her maiden speech, new Greens member for South Brisbane, Amy MacMahon, declared the state's rich mineral deposits to be "a wealth enjoyed only by the few at the expense of the many" and vowed to continue pushing for change.

Labor was comfortably re-elected in its own right.

Mining company New Hope spent \$658,521.31 just campaigning for the next government to finalise approvals for the stage three expansion of its mine in southern Queensland.

In disclosures made to date, the third biggest campaign outlay from a third party came from the Shooters Union, which disclosed \$201,767.21.

<https://thenewdaily.com.au/news/2020/12/18/fossil-fuel-in-dustry-jobs-transition/>

Fossil fuel workers want government to start renewable transition

New Daily, 18/12/2020

Australian fossil fuel workers say they know the writing is on the wall and want help transitioning into a renewable future, so they can save their communities before it's too late.

It comes as new research shows if Australia starts to transition its labour market force away from fossil fuels, we can avoid any involuntary redundancies or disruption to communities.

Angus Middleton, a delegate at the United Workers Union represents the refinery workers. He said they've started a working group to determine what a renewable energy transition would look like.

"This project straddles the opportunities of renewables and green hydrogen – and the possibilities of diverse advanced manufacturing in the industries downstream of the refinery," he said.

A new report from Australia Institute's Centre for Future Work has found we can transition to renewable without losing a single job.

Around 133,000 people were employed in fossil-fuel jobs in 2019 –around 1% of Australia's total jobs.

Approximately 50,000 of those jobs are in the coal industry.

Centre for Future Work director Dr Jim Stanford said, "A clear long term timetable is critical.

"People in the industry can make plans, communities can make plans and critically people don't go into the industry thinking it's a place to build their careers. That's one of my biggest concerns."

Across the fossil fuel industries, most of the workers are older, which mean the majority of jobs could easily be phased out by people entering voluntary retirement over the next 20 years.

If we started planning now, we would only need to transition roughly 3,000 jobs, and this could be done easily, he said.

"Over two million Australians change their jobs every year. So the scale of the challenge is manageable."

That could be managed by assuring workers received the same pay with government top-ups for five to ten years in their new jobs, he said.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/dec/21/coalition-should-commit-to-halving-emissions-this-decade-says-conservative-thinktank>

Coalition should commit to halving emissions this decade, says conservative thinktank

Katharine Murphy, Guardian, 21/12/2020

A centre-right thinktank with links to former Liberal ministers Robert Hill and Christopher Pyne has said the Morrison government should commit to halving emissions from coal-fired electricity this decade, and the Coalition could drive the change by using some existing policies.

A report from the Blueprint Institute said the latest emissions projections released by the government indicated Australia would not meet its 2030 target. The only way to permanently reduce carbon emissions was to "reduce our economy's structural reliance on them".

Coal-fired power generation was now in "permanent decline", it said, and in 2019, 21% of Australia's electricity came from renewable sources. Since the last coal plant was commissioned in 2009, wind power had grown by 15% a year, solar by almost 50% a year, "and that paces is accelerating".

The report, to be released on Monday, said the transformation trend was so baked in it was no longer a question of the government making a decision to end coal-fired generation: "Its end is inevitable, its role in permanent decline.

"All that's left for the commonwealth to decide is whether it's willing to step up and coordinate an orderly phase-down that provides certainty for communities, workers, consumers, and investors."

The Blueprint Institute is a relatively new thinktank drawing staff who have worked for federal Liberal MPs – including Julie Bishop and Dave Sharma – and policy experts.

Its report, "Phasing Down Gracefully", suggested the government could manage the retirement of coal generation in an orderly fashion – and with fewer job losses than was sometimes claimed in Australia's hyper-partisan brawling about climate policy – by announcing new sectoral emissions reduction targets for 2026, 2028 and beyond the current medium-term target for 2030.

In terms of job losses, the report noted Australia's coal industry employed 50,000 workers directly and 120,000 workers indirectly.

But it said the coal-fired generation sector employed fewer than 10,000 workers.



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