

29 March 2021

Gas Taskforce  
Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources  
Australian Government  
Via online submission form

### **Submission to the Gas Fired Recovery Plan Consultation**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission regarding the proposed [National Gas Infrastructure Plan \(NGIP\)](#).

Given that the proposed NGIP will profoundly impact the lives of all Australians, as well as the global community, our key questions are:

1. Who wrote it?
2. What assumptions is it making?
3. In whose interests is it?
4. Why is it ignoring significant [evidence](#) from independent experts (in energy, technology, science, health, engineering, economics) that zero emission energy alternatives combined with efficient storage and distribution systems are far safer, more secure and affordable?<sup>1</sup>
5. Who will ultimately bear the costs (financial and otherwise) of the NGIP now and in the future?

#### **Gas's role in our climate breakdown**

Gas is a finite fossil fuel that can only be burned once. Gas is largely methane, a greenhouse gas around 85 times more potent than CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere, when viewed over a 20-year time span.<sup>2</sup> Research shows that at every stage of gas production, distribution and consumption, [fugitive emissions of methane](#) are released and scientists are deeply concerned that the extent to which our environment is 'awash' with methane and the true climate cost of this is not being properly accounted.<sup>3</sup>

It is for these reasons that a group of 25 leading Australian scientists (including lead authors with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) responded to Australia's Chief Scientist, Dr Alan Finkel's support for gas as an energy source with an [open letter](#) arguing that it is not consistent with a safe climate.<sup>4</sup> Further to this, the absurdity of the Government's gas plans has prompted the formation of a Beyond Gas Network, a community driven alliance of experts and citizens to actively challenge gas projects at every step and stage.

Meanwhile, gas extraction methods are crude and carry enormous health risks. The landscape is scarred and degraded. Groundwater, soils and local environments are contaminated with chemicals (including carcinogens and neurotoxins) while huge amounts of fresh water are wasted in the extraction process. Some or all of these factors combined explain why many jurisdictions, including France, Germany, Northern Ireland, Bulgaria, as well as many counties across a number of US states, and Victoria have already outright banned fracking.

As Australia's horrific 2019/2020 Inferno Summer demonstrated, we are already experiencing advanced climate and biodiversity collapse as a direct result of mining and burning fossil fuels (among other greenhouse gas intensive activities). Warnings date back more than half a century. Based on the best available science, all fossil fuel projects represent direct threats to the local and global community and must be phased out as quickly as humanly possible. Not only has the fossil fuel industry known of the grave dangers of its products since the 1970s, it has aggressively driven [campaigns to mislead and deceive on climate facts while promoting misinformation](#).<sup>5</sup>

### **Gaslighting Australia**

According to the global, independent anti-corruption agency [Transparency International](#), corruption is “the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. Corruption erodes trust, weakens democracy, hampers economic development and further exacerbates inequality, poverty, social division and the environmental crisis”.<sup>6</sup>

Back in 2007 “former Country Young Liberal of the Year, Howard government ministerial speechwriter and aspiring federal candidate”—and subsequent author of [High & Dry: John Howard, climate change and the selling of Australia's future](#)—Guy Pearse revealed that Australia's self-proclaimed *Greenhouse Mafia* were effectively drafting Australia's climate, environment and energy policies in order to maximise their profits from the extraction and exploitation of Australia's finite resources.<sup>7</sup> A glance at the Morrison government's [National COVID-19 Commission](#)<sup>8</sup> (the NCC, and its ‘gas-fired recovery taskforce’) and indeed the proposed [NGIP](#) suggests that such conflicts of interest likely now run even deeper.

According to [public integrity experts](#), the public is right to be seriously concerned about the NCC's:

- apparent lack of any legislative underpinning;
- apparent lack of any clear, independent appointment process typically expected of publicly funded bodies;
- apparent lack of legal clarity whether it can form part of cabinet and rely on cabinet confidentiality;
- absence of a duty to publicly disclose conflicts of interest; and
- opaque operations.<sup>9</sup>

As has been the subject of questioning during the [Senate Select Committee on Covid-19](#), at least five members of the manufacturing task force advising the commission have direct financial or commercial interests in the development of infrastructure for gas.<sup>10</sup> And given that economies with higher levels of education/training, diversity and complexity are healthier and more [resilient](#),<sup>11</sup> the commission's particular fondness for [gas development](#) to steer Australia out of economic ruin is illogical at best.<sup>12</sup>

Of course, this is not to suggest that Australia doesn't have a gas problem that needs solving. As the [ACCC's Inquiry](#) into gas supply arrangements<sup>13</sup> shows, for many years Australian consumers have been paying [significantly higher prices](#) than the equivalent export price of our gas (LNG); an extremely unfair situation that the Coalition government has either wilfully or deliberately ignored.<sup>14</sup>

Contrary to expert advice and basic logic, the Morrison government has been arguing that in order to save our economy public money is going to have to fund [new greenhouse gas intense gas projects](#) because the private sector won't.<sup>15</sup> Of course this was welcome but likely not surprising news for the [Coalition's major donors](#).<sup>16</sup>

In addition to this market intervention, the so-called free-market driven Morrison government is trying to force through changes to the mandates of both clean energy agencies ([Arena and CEFC](#)) so that they can be used as vehicles for further publicly funding polluting, inefficient and costly fossil fuel infrastructure.<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile, the clear evidence that batteries combined with renewable energy can provide [inertia and system strength in the National Electricity Market](#) as coal is retired is, it seems, deliberately being ignored.<sup>18</sup>

Either way, surely, if there was any chance of carbon capture and storage (CCS) being effective and economical, as well as safe (escaping plumes of CO<sub>2</sub> are deadly) then the commercial sector (rather than taxpayers) would have driven its development decades ago. In reality, CCS is a model example of 'predatory delay'<sup>19</sup>. In short, apparently designed by its political donors, the Coalition government's COVID recovery plan is to use taxpayers' money to prop up costly, experimental, inefficient and ecocidal so-called "low emission" technologies that will turbocharge the climate and biodiversity emergency.

### **A Ruthless Industry**

As climate and environment protection, and social justice activists the world over have discovered, there appears no depths that the fossil fuel industry won't go to protect its profits. This was made abundantly clear when its own people inadvertently revealed the industry's use of [psy-ops specialists](#)—people trained in psychological manipulation designed to deceive, confuse and demoralise enemies in warfare—to disrupt and destabilise local communities who are referring to well established scientific facts to resist fracking.<sup>20</sup> In his latest documentary, [The Truth Has Changed](#), Josh Fox (creator of [Gasland](#), 2010) reveals how aggressive misinformation tactics, alongside appalling personal abuse—smear campaigns, intimidation, character assassination, doxing, death threats—are being used to silence and intimidate people questioning the gas industry's business activities.<sup>21</sup> Clearly it's not just groundwaters, people, animals, plants, soils and the global climate, but our democracies that are now on the line.

In our view, the NCC and NGIP are just further evidence that our decision makers are not acting in the best interests of Australians. Expressed another way, that Australia has [a serious corruption problem](#)<sup>22</sup> in urgent need of address. Fortunately, The Centre for Public Integrity's '[Integrity Reform Agenda](#)', drafted by former judges and integrity experts, outlines precisely the accountability reforms needed now to restore public trust in Australia's democracy.<sup>23</sup> And we would also suggest that all Australians politicians and advisors be legally required to undergo public integrity training conducted by independent Integrity Commissions (in respective jurisdictions) before entering parliaments.

In concluding we wish to emphasize that this submission, along with numerous others located on our respective websites, has been prepared to voice the deep concerns of thousands of private citizens associated with our various independent, non-profit community groups. In other words, we have no vested interests, nobody is paying or compensating us in any way for this work and there is nothing covert about our access to our democratically elected representatives.

Thank you for your attention to this submission. We would welcome any queries you may have.

Yours faithfully,



Deborah Hart, on behalf of

[ClimActs](http://climacts.org.au) – [climacts.org.au](http://climacts.org.au)

[CLIMARTE](http://climarte.org) – [climarte.org](http://climarte.org)

[LIVE](http://live.org.au) – [live.org.au](http://live.org.au)



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<sup>1</sup> <https://bze.org.au/research/>, Link to Beyond Zero Emissions Research section

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.climatechange2013.org/images/report/WG1AR5\\_Chapter08\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.climatechange2013.org/images/report/WG1AR5_Chapter08_FINAL.pdf)

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.smh.com.au/environment/climate-change/sydney-awash-with-leaks-as-research-shows-the-climate-cost-of-gas-20200828-p55qd5.html> Nick O'Malley, 'Sydney awash with leaks as research shows the climate cost of gas' *SMH*, 13 September 2020

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.smh.com.au/environment/climate-change/australia-s-chief-scientist-is-wrong-on-gas-say-leading-experts-20200824-p55oty.html> Nick O'Mally, 'Australia's Chief Scientist is wrong on gas, say leading experts', *SMH*, 25 August 2020

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<sup>7</sup> Guy Pearse, *High & Dry: John Howard, climate change and the selling of Australia's future*, Penguin Books, 2007

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.pmc.gov.au/ncc>, NCC website

<sup>9</sup> [https://government.unimelb.edu.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0006/3457725/GDC-Policy-Brief-4\\_Private-Actors-and-Crisis\\_final.pdf](https://government.unimelb.edu.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0006/3457725/GDC-Policy-Brief-4_Private-Actors-and-Crisis_final.pdf), Elizabeth Hicks, 'Private Actors & Crisis: Scrutinising the National Covid-19 Commission Advisory Board' Policy Brief No. 4, Melbourne School of Government, University of Melbourne, published 5 August 2020

<sup>10</sup> Commonwealth of Australia Official Committee Hansard, Senate Select Committee on COVID-19, Thursday 4 June 2020, Canberra

<sup>11</sup> <https://theconversation.com/what-makes-one-economy-more-resilient-than-another-54374>, Stephen J. Goetz, David A. Fleming-Muñoz, Yichaeol Han, 'What makes one economy more resilient than another?' *The Conversation*, 7 March 2016

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/may/21/leaked-covid-19-commission-report-calls-for-australian-taxpayers-to-underwrite-gas-industry-expansion?CMP=Share\\_iOSApp\\_Other](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/may/21/leaked-covid-19-commission-report-calls-for-australian-taxpayers-to-underwrite-gas-industry-expansion?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other), Adam Morton, 'Leaked Covid-19 commission report calls for Australian taxpayers to underwrite gas industry expansion', *The Guardian*, 21 May 2020

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