

Submission to the Senate inquiry into oil and gas exploration and production in the Beetaloo Basin

I am a retired teacher educator living in Sydney. I have spent much of my working life encouraging future teachers to take an interest in the government of their country so that they can assist their students to do the same and become informed voters. That said I sometimes find that the actions of the politicians we voters elect leave me perplexed.

The decision by the current government to spend \$50million for “Oil and gas exploration and production in the Beetaloo Basin” is one such action.

The obvious question is: **why would you spend money on a technology that is on the way out when the technologies of the future are readily available?**

The gas companies and the government’s argument that gas is needed so that we can transition from coal to renewable energy sounds rather empty when Australia’s largest gas and electricity market operator the AEMO, in its 2020 Integrated System Plan, outlines a pathway for that transition in Australia without the need for gas.

Gas may be cleaner than coal but it is still a fossil fuel that produces green house gas.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) has declared **there is no room for new fossil fuel investment if we’re to avoid catastrophic climate change**. The business community knows this and is progressively moving away from investment in fossil fuels. Business would not do this if it did not consider the risk to its investment too great. The Biden Administration in the US and the other members of the G7 are moving away from fossil fuels too.

The gas that has a future is not methane be it from coal seams or shale, it is hydrogen. The Prime Ministers recent talking up of hydrogen hubs in Australia recognises this. Unfortunately the government’s plan still uses fossil fuels to produce “blue” hydrogen. Other countries such as South Korea, Germany and Spain have already committed much more to

research and produce “green” hydrogen which will have no greenhouse emissions. Australia’s proposed hydrogen hubs sound like too little too late.

What can the Australian Government do? Interestingly, Daly Waters which is very near the Beetaloo Basin receives a daily average of nearly nine hours of sunshine, the origin of our energy system. **The government’s \$50 million would be better spent using solar energy to produce “green” hydrogen in the Beetaloo Basin.**

My primary focus here has been on the government’s proposed actions which fly in the face of known scientific and economic data. Equally important however, is the disregard shown for the wishes of the traditional owners of the land upon which the exploration and possible future production of gas will be carried out. The traditional owners are the people best able to present their own case. My role, and I would hope that of the government, is to listen and to respect their wishes. **Traditional owners asked for their voice to be heard in 2017 in the “Uluru Statement from the Heart.” The message I hear is that they do not want fracking on their land.**

The companies that want to explore for and produce gas say as they always do that their operations are quite safe and will not harm the environment. The fracking in the US where most research has been done has not been on arid land such as that found in the Beetaloo Basin. Matters such as the use of and the disposal of water in such a region are still unclear **Clearly, more research needs to be done before this proposal for oil and gas exploration and production can go ahead. That is assuming that the proposal made scientific and economic sense in the first place, which I have argue above it does not.**