



Submission to the inquiry into oil
and gas exploration and
production in the Beetaloo Basin
to the Senate Environment
and Communications References
Committee

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Submitted by

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About Hornsby Shire Climate Action

Hornsby Shire Climate Action Group is a group of residents of the Hornsby Shire who share a deep concern about the escalating effects of climate change and want to see greater action taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions at local, state and federal level.

The group has over 250 members of various ages and occupations.

Hornsby Shire is also known as the “Bushland Shire”. It sits on the North-Western fringe of Sydney and has a high interface between urban development and bushland. It is one of the urban areas most at risk of bushfire in Australia. During the 2019-2020 bushfire season, the shire was mostly spared thanks to the tireless work of the Rural Fire Service and other agencies but also because of sheer luck. The Gospers Mountain mega blaze stopped at the Hawkesbury River (the Northern boundary of our shire). Had the blaze crossed the river on a high temperature and wind day, the consequences for the tens of thousands of people who live here would have been catastrophic.

The Bushfire Royal Commission report tabled in Parliament by the Federal Government acknowledged that climate change fuelled the Black Summer bushfire season, and that we have entered into an era of severe consequences for our inaction on climate change.

As residents in a high bushfire area, we must speak out on the climate crisis and therefore wish to register our strong opposition to the development of the Beetaloo Basin for oil and gas exploration and production, **with particular reference to the Industry Research and Development (Beetaloo Cooperative Drilling Program) Instrument 2021, which provides public money for oil and gas corporations.**

We oppose the Beetaloo oil and gas expansionary project as well as its public funding for the following reasons:

1. It goes against the current Paris Agreement goal to limit global temperatures to 1.5 degrees warming.
2. The project does not have the consent of the Traditional Owners.
3. It is a misuse of public funds.

1 – Paris Agreement

According to documents obtained under Freedom of Information in 2020, the Environment and Energy Department warned its Minister Angus Taylor in 2019 that “Emissions from development of onshore shale gas in the Northern Territory may be difficult to offset and could impact on Australia's progress in meeting Paris Agreement commitments”.

It has been estimated that the basin could generate 117 million tonnes of greenhouse gas – this would be equivalent to 22 per cent of Australia's current annual emissions.

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In its report titled "Net Zero by 2050; A Roadmap for the Global Energy Sector" published in June this year, the International Energy Agency (IEA) says "there are no new oil and gas fields approved for development in our pathway [to net-zero], and no new coal mines or mine extensions are required." In effect, the IEA says **that for the world to meet the aims of the Paris Climate Agreement there can be no new coal, oil and gas projects from 2021 onwards.**

2 – Traditional Owners

In September 2020, the Traditional Owners requested that the local land council, which had been negotiating on their behalf, withdraw from talks with the gas companies. The newly formed Nurrdalindi Native Title Aboriginal Corporation will allow Native Title holders on Daly Waters to take back control of their negotiating rights.

One of the concerns of the Traditional Owners is the impact of the project on their access to safe drinking water. There is no safe way to store the wastewater from fracking in storage ponds given the monsoon season and the risk of floods.

Hornsby Shire Climate Action supports the Traditional Owners in their fight to protect their land and water from fracking and opposes the use of public funds for an industry which is effectively not wanted in the Northern Territory.

3 – Public Funds

The Federal Government proposes to commit \$220 million in new funding to support the Beetaloo development. This includes the **\$50 million Beetaloo Cooperative Drilling Program** which is an incentive for explorers to drive exploration in the Beetaloo. This is fiscally irresponsible, effectively putting all the risk on the Australian taxpayer with the possibility of having no return on investment.

This support of the Federal Government is part of its "gas-fired recovery". There is no evidence that a gas-fired recovery will create jobs. The gas industry currently employs 0.2% of the Australian workforce. It is one of the most capital intensive, job poor industries in Australia (Source: ABS (2020) 81550DO002_201718 Australian Industry, 2017-18). In addition, all major gas importing countries are committed to net zero emissions by 2050. This will have a direct effect on their energy mix and thus their gas imports.

Hornsby Shire Climate Action therefore argues that there will be no benefit to the taxpayer or the Australian community in subsidising the exploration of the Beetaloo Gas Basin and financing the necessary infrastructure.