

## **Submission to the Senate Select Committee**

### **Inquiry into the Taxation of Gas Resources**

#### **Submitted by:**

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### **Executive Summary**

The Onslow Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) submit this response to the Senate Select Committee on the Taxation of Gas Resources to provide a regional host-community perspective on the implications of potential changes to gas taxation arrangements.

Onslow is a remote Pilbara town of approximately 850 people that hosts nationally significant gas infrastructure through the Chevron-operated Wheatstone Project. For more than two decades, Wheatstone has demonstrated how a long-term gas project, underpinned by stable fiscal and regulatory settings, can deliver sustained and transformational outcomes for a regional community. More than **\$360 million** has been invested directly into Onslow's community infrastructure, essential services, social programs and local economic development; investment that has fundamentally reshaped the town's liveability, resilience and long-term sustainability.

The OCCI is concerned that any material increase in taxation applied to gas projects such as Wheatstone, if not carefully designed, risks sending negative investment signals that may reduce proponents' capacity or willingness to continue delivering place-based investment in regional host communities. For towns like Onslow, these contributions are not discretionary or supplementary; they are essential to addressing the structural challenges of remoteness, infrastructure deficits, workforce retention and service delivery that cannot be met through market forces alone.

The Chamber strongly urges the Committee to ensure that any consideration of changes to gas taxation recognises and protects the direct benefits currently flowing to regional host communities. Redirecting funds that would otherwise be reinvested locally into consolidated federal revenue, without mechanisms to safeguard regional reinvestment, risks diluting the very outcomes that enable regional communities to host and support nationally critical energy infrastructure.

From the OCCI's perspective, maintaining strong local investment outcomes must be a key consideration alongside national revenue objectives. Regional equity must be central to the Committee's deliberations, ensuring that communities hosting major gas developments are not inadvertently disadvantaged by policy changes that weaken long-standing partnership models which have delivered economic, social and community benefit.

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## 1. Introduction

The Onslow Chamber of Commerce and Industry represents local businesses, social enterprises, employers and community stakeholders in Onslow, a remote Pilbara town that has experienced significant transformation over the past two decades as a result of major resource investment. As the peak body for business in the town, the Chamber provides a practical, on-the-ground perspective on how national energy and taxation policy settings directly affect regional communities.

This submission focuses explicitly on the Chevron-operated Wheatstone Project and the demonstrated positive economic, social and community outcomes it has delivered in Onslow. It is intended to inform the Committee's consideration of gas taxation arrangements by highlighting how long-term gas projects, supported by stable fiscal frameworks, can deliver enduring regional benefits alongside national revenue outcomes.

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## 2. Onslow and the Wheatstone Project

The Chevron-operated Wheatstone Project is located approximately 12 kilometres west of Onslow and is one of Australia's largest LNG developments. The project comprises two LNG trains and a domestic gas facility with a combined LNG capacity of 8.9 million tonnes per annum, supplying both export markets and the Western Australian domestic gas market.

The Wheatstone Project operates under the Ashburton North State Development Agreement, which requires Chevron to deliver a comprehensive Community Development Plan (CDP) focused on long-term social, economic and infrastructure outcomes for Onslow and the wider Pilbara region.

From the OCCI's perspective, Wheatstone is not simply an industrial facility; it is a cornerstone partner in the town's viability, liveability and economic resilience.

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## 3. Transformational Community Investment

### 3.1 Over \$360 Million Invested in Community Infrastructure

Through the State Development Agreement and its long-standing partnership with the Shire of Ashburton, the Chevron-operated Wheatstone Project has contributed over **\$360 million** to critical infrastructure in Onslow, including:

- Onslow Airport
- Onslow Aquatic Centre
- Onslow Hospital
- St John Ambulance Sub-Centre
- Onslow Ring Road
- Shire Administration Complex
- Power and water supply infrastructure upgrades, including a new town desalination plant
- Onslow Community Boating Precinct
- Onslow Town Masterplan
- Wastewater Treatment Facility

- Old Onslow conservation
- Government Regional Housing Officer housing
- Chevron residential workforce housing
- Onslow Men's Shed
- Onslow Bike Pump Track

Recent examples include the Onslow Town Centre Transformation, which is revitalising the town's main street, improving safety, accessibility, tourism amenity and supporting local businesses.

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### 3.2 Social Investment and Community Wellbeing

In addition to infrastructure investment, the Chevron-operated Wheatstone Project is committed to supporting the social prosperity of Onslow through active and integrated community partnerships, including:

- Telethon Speech & Hearing program
- Onslow School education collaboration
- *Working Together for Onslow* partnership with the Shire of Ashburton (approx. \$200,000 per annum)
- Onslow Chamber of Commerce and Industry – Principal Partner (approx. \$250,000 per annum)
- Swans Onslow (Youth Services) – Active Youth Development Program
- One Tree Community Services (Childcare) – attraction and retention funding to maintain service viability
- Provision of free physiotherapy and counselling services to all Onslow residents

These investments have reshaped Onslow from a highly constrained remote town into a functioning, attractive and sustainable regional community.

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### 3.3 Securing Water and Essential Services

One of the most profound impacts of Wheatstone's investment has been in securing long-term water supply—fundamental to community sustainability and business confidence.

Under the State Development Agreement, the Wheatstone Project has contributed more than **\$68 million** towards the Onslow Water Infrastructure Upgrade Project, including funding for regional Western Australia's first public seawater desalination plant.

This project:

- Secures climate-resilient drinking water
- Unlocks future residential and business growth
- Reduces reliance on rainfall-dependent bore fields
- Creates local jobs and procurement opportunities

Without this investment, Onslow's long-term future would remain severely constrained.

## 4. Economic and Local Business Impact

### 4.1 Sustained Local Business Engagement

For more than 20 years, Chevron has provided consistent and meaningful support to the Onslow business community, including as the principal partner of the Onslow Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

This support has enabled:

- Local suppliers to access long-term contracts and capability building
- Small businesses to grow alongside the project lifecycle
- Improved business confidence and workforce stability
- Investment in local training, safety and compliance capability

Unlike short-term construction booms, Wheatstone's operational presence has provided economic continuity, supporting local enterprises through multiple economic cycles.

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## 5. Relevance to the Committee's Inquiry – Investment Signalling and Regional Equity

The OCCI acknowledges the Committee's mandate to examine whether Australia's taxation settings appropriately capture value from gas resources. However, from a regional host-community perspective, taxation policy also functions as a powerful form of **investment signalling**, influencing long-term investment behaviour and the scale of ongoing reinvestment in host regions.

The Wheatstone Project demonstrates that:

- Long-term, stable taxation and investment frameworks enable substantial, enduring regional contributions
- Community benefits delivered through State Development Agreements and social investment are material, measurable and transformational
- Changes to taxation settings can materially affect:
  - Regional investment certainty
  - Community funding streams
  - Long-term delivery of social and economic infrastructure in host towns

Onslow's experience highlights that gas taxation policy cannot be assessed solely through national revenue metrics. It must also consider **regional equity outcomes**, including whether communities that host nationally significant energy infrastructure continue to receive the level of reinvestment required to support population retention, service delivery and economic resilience.

Without such consideration, there is a risk that policy changes may unintentionally shift investment away from the communities that bear the greatest infrastructure and social burden, widening the gap between metropolitan benefit and regional impact.

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## 7. Conclusion

The Onslow Chamber of Commerce and Industry emphasises that regional communities hosting major gas developments must not be disproportionately impacted by changes to taxation settings.

For Onslow, investments delivered through the Wheatstone Project have addressed critical gaps in infrastructure, water security, community facilities and business capability, gaps that would otherwise remain unfilled. Any increase in taxation that reduces a project's capacity or incentive to reinvest locally risks undermining social licence, regional resilience and long-term community sustainability.

The OCCI is particularly concerned that changes which redirect funds away from place-based regional investment into consolidated federal revenue, without safeguards for reinvestment in host communities, would result in remote towns losing access to the very resources required to support nationally significant energy developments.

The Chevron-operated Wheatstone Project stands as a nationally significant example of how gas development, when underpinned by stable policy settings and genuine community partnership, can deliver:

- Economic resilience
- Social wellbeing
- World-class infrastructure
- Long-term community benefit

The Chamber respectfully urges the Committee to ensure that regional equity and investment signalling impacts are central considerations in its final recommendations.