



Yingiya Mark Guyula MLA
Member for Mulka, NT Legislative Assembly



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Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees
on Environment and Communications
ec.sen@aph.gov.au

Oil and Gas Exploration and Production in the Beetaloo Basin Submission

I make this submission as a Yolŋu elder from North East Arnhem Land. I am a senior leader of the Lija Dhalinyirr people of the Djambarrpuyŋu clan. I also make this Submission as the elected Member for Mulka in the Northern Territory.

I want to voice concerns about oil and gas exploration in the Beetaloo Basin. The waters of this region are also considered significant through Yolŋu culture. Our song lines and our ceremonial songs sing about the underwater channels that connect the Beetaloo Basin country to Yolŋu country. We have great concerns for Fracking in this region and the spiritual, cultural and environmental impact it may have for our people. These connections through our songlines create an onus of responsibility to care for that country. These connections also remind us that a poisoned aquifer could have far reaching implications.

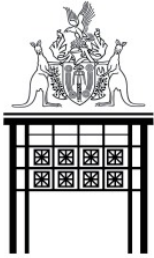
As a Member of the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly, I have spoken to many elders and leaders from the Beetaloo Basin who have expressed great heartache about the oil and gas exploration on their country. It is these elders and leaders who must now be consulted in relation to the future of production on their country.

Before Australian funding is poured into this industry, due process must be observed, whereby the elders and leaders and communities of this region are rightfully allowed to enact their responsibility for their country. For First Nations people, it is highly important that we have the opportunity to exercise our right of responsibility so that we are fulfilling our law.

For example, in Yolŋu culture, our responsibility for our physical surroundings—the trees, rocks and waterways—are also part of our spiritual realm. It tells a story of our beliefs and it is our ancestors. We are inextricably connected to all of it.

My moiety is Dhuwa and I know of all environmental surroundings that share this moiety of Dhuwa. I know all the elements that are Yirritja: this is my mother's and my wife's moiety. The environment

Address: Mulka Electorate Office, Endeavour Square, Nhulunbuy NT 0880
Postal Address: PO Box 1045, Nhulunbuy NT 0881
Phone: 08 8987 0125 Email: electorate.mulka@nt.gov.au



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and the essence of life: the air, land, water, and trees we came out of the land to live off it, to treat it as life.

We relate to the land as the yothu-yindi, mari-gutharra, yapa-waku, grandmother/grandchild relationship, yapa-walkur as great grandmother/great grandchildren relationship, as our families. Just like Dr Mandawuy Yunupingu said, 'We do not own mother earth; the earth owns us.'

We see a mountain being pulled down and there are tears for the spirits of our fathers and our grandmothers. Even if we sit around at hunting camps and fishing spots, people always say when children go and start chopping down trees that you are chopping down the spirits. That tree is an alive spiritual tree that has the spirit of our father. Misusing the trees, the rocks, the ground or the water is against our law and that is firmly part of our education.

When people start abusing land through misuse, we can see it through Yolŋu eyes. We can see blood pouring out. A life is being destroyed and it will never be the same. These ancestral beings have poured their knowledge into those sites. When we say no to fracking it is because our ancestral beings travelled the water below, now buried by time. Through songs and ceremonies of ngarra, dhapi, marradjiri and guapipi, we know of the sacred waters below. When we die, our spirits go back into the country and when we are born our spirits come from country, from our ancestors. When we speak about caring for land, it is at a very deep level.

Consequently, I appeal to the Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications that the elders and leaders of the Beetaloo Basin are given the opportunity to speak for their country and determine the future of their land.

I'd also like to mention the very short submission timeline for this Inquiry. The people most interested and impacted by this Inquiry may have required much more time to engage in this process. An extension of the submission deadline, and a community hearing would allow for a more thorough inquiry.

Yours Sincerely

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