

Senate Inquiry Submission: Oil and gas exploration and production in the Beetaloo Basin

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August 30, 2022

1 Objection

I am a research scientist in the mathematical and physical sciences.

I OBJECT to the *Industry Research and Development (Beetaloo Cooperative Drilling Program) Instrument 2021*. The purpose of this Program is to encourage and facilitate gas exploration in the Beetaloo sub-basin. As such, this Program would cause unacceptable and irreversible harm by contributing to global warming and worsening the climate crisis.

2 No New Fossil Fuel Projects

Climate science is perfectly clear on this point: Even a 50% chance of limiting warming to 1.5°C requires that no new fossil fuel projects be allowed to proceed. Each new project that is approved is reducing that chance. The following quotes from scientific reports are pertinent.

The Production Gap Report 2021 [1]. Key findings include:

- “Governments plan to produce more than twice the amount of fossil fuels in 2030 than would be consistent with limiting warming to 1.5°C.”
- “Global fossil fuel production must start declining immediately and steeply to be consistent with limiting long-term warming to 1.5°C.”

Phaseout Pathways for Fossil Fuel Production within Paris-compliant carbon budgets [2], (March 2022). Headline finding p6:

- “To comply with the carbon budget for a 50:50 chance of not exceeding 1.5°C of warming requires immediate and deep cuts in the production of all fossil fuels. There are no exceptions; all nations need to begin a rapid and just phaseout of existing production. The report makes absolutely clear that there is no capacity in the carbon budget for opening up new production facilities of any kind, whether coal mines, oil wells or gas terminals. A transition based on principles of equity requires wealthy, high-emitting nations to phase out all oil and gas production by 2034 while the poorest nations have until 2050 to end production.”

Existing fossil fuel extraction would warm the world beyond 1.5°C [3], (May 2022):

- “We find that staying within a 1.5°C carbon budget (50% probability) implies leaving almost 40% of ‘developed reserves’ of fossil fuels unextracted.”
- “Going beyond recent warnings by the International Energy Agency, our results suggest that staying below 1.5°C may require governments and companies not only to cease licensing and development of new fields and mines, but also to prematurely decommission a significant portion of those already developed.”

3 Ethical and legal responsibility

Even 1.5°C of global warming is predicted to be environmentally catastrophic. For instance, it risks destruction of the Great Barrier Reef (GBR).

The human imperative of stabilizing global climate change at 1.5°C, [4], (September 2019), p5:

- “there are multiple lines of evidence indicating that 70 to 90% of warm-water tropical corals present today are at risk of being eliminated even if warming is restrained to 1.5°C.”

Responsibility for the Great Barrier Reef falls to the Australian Government. Article 4 of the legally binding **World Heritage Convention** [5] requires that Australia protect the GBR and

- “do all it can to this end, to the utmost of its own resources and, where appropriate, with any international assistance and co-operation, in particular, financial, artistic, scientific and technical, which it may be able to obtain.”

With the results of the previous section, one sees that a 50% chance of not destroying 70–90% of the GBR requires that no new fossil fuel projects be built world-wide. With ‘international assistance and co-operation’ Australia can try to save the GBR by advocating that other countries stop building new fossil fuel projects. *But Australia must do so first.*

By continuing to promote further production and export of fossil fuels, the Australian Government is forgoing the opportunity to advocate for climate action that might save the GBR.

4 Conclusions

The Beetaloo Cooperative Drilling Program, which is a plan to encourage and facilitate further fossil fuel production by providing public money for oil and gas corporations,

- is based on climate science denial, including gross underestimation of climate change impacts;
- would significantly contribute to destruction of the Great Barrier Reef — Australia would not be able to protect the GBR in ways that it would otherwise be able to;
- is inconsistent with the 1.5°C goal of the Paris Agreement;
- violates Article 4 of the World Heritage Convention.

The Beetaloo Cooperative Drilling Program is a *climate crime* and it should be abolished.

References

- [1] *The Production Gap Report 2021*, SEI, IISD, ODI, E3G, and UNEP (2021)
<https://productiongap.org>
- [2] *Phaseout pathways for fossil fuel production within Paris-compliant carbon budgets*
Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research (March 2022)
https://www.research.manchester.ac.uk/portal/files/213256008/Tyndall_Production_Phaseout_Report_final_text_3_.pdf
- [3] *Existing fossil fuel extraction would warm the world beyond 1.5°C*
K. Trout, G. Muttitt, D. Lafleur, T. Vande Graaf, R. Mendelevitch, L. Mei, and M. Meinshausen, *Environ. Res. Lett.* **17** 064010 (May 2022)
<https://doi.org/10.1088/1748-9326/ac6228>
- [4] *The human imperative of stabilizing global climate change at 1.5°C*,
Ove Hoegh-Guldberg, et al., *Science* **365**, 1263 (September 2019)
<https://climateanalytics.org/media/eaaw6974.full.pdf>
- [5] *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* (1972)
<https://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext>