

Good afternoon senators, my fellow community members and other guests,

My name is Phoebe Wiltshire and I represent the Darwin High School students for climate action committee. In September of last year, I organised a school strike for climate in protest of the proposed middle arm industrial precinct because horrified by the devastating climate impacts it would have and the total disregard of input from traditional owners and local stakeholders. But the risks of Middle arm extend far beyond climate. Our concerns also must turn to the potential human health threats to Territorians, including our parents and ourselves from the precinct industries, and the associated expanded gas plants. If this goes ahead it will be a threat now, for my lifetime and future generations.

We see the CHO being the trusted umpire, we ask that she and you the inquiry ensure that human health is not at risk. We ask you consider populations suffering from poorer health, particularly indigenous populations and those living in disadvantaged circumstances. That you consider the immense mental health impact on us as the land we have lived on all our lives, the places that hold our memories are destroyed and made unliveable. It is important that health assessments be a decisive factor in determining whether the development goes ahead and must ensure that there is no greater danger to local young people, who will obviously be exposed to these dangerous emissions for longer periods over their lifetime.

As explained in our submission, we recognised the two gas plants already have approval to be expanded to double their existing sizes which is financially viable. But these are short term jobs that just like the impex project will severely strain the economy before any improvements while the damages middle arm will incur are forever.

The human health risk assessment is highly significant. The CHO has committed to “protecting the health of all Territorians” and determining the “impacts of emissions and discharges to air, water and soil”. And so as young Territorians, we look to her to ensure that the industries are safe, to ensure the expansion of the gas plants and the massive risks they pose to both people and the natural environment are reviewed and acted upon not only under legal obligation but to best practice.

We ask that the Senate committee and NT Government confirm in tomorrow’s NTG hearing, the CHO’s human health threat assessment role and responsibilities that will ensure the health of local Territorians and support her conclusions. We implore you to recognise that it is our future on the line. As students and young people, we will live with the results of your actions. Your choices will shape the territory and our lives for the next century, and we urge you to make the correct one.