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Submission to Hunter Gas Pipeline Proposal

Introduction:

The Clarence Environment Centre (CEC) has maintained a shop-front in Grafton for almost 30 years, and has a proud history of environmental advocacy. The conservation of Australia's natural environment, both terrestrial and marine, has always been a priority for our members, and we believe the maintenance of healthy ecosystems and biodiversity is of paramount importance.

We see climate change as one of the greatest threats, not only to biodiversity, but to the actual survival of humans on this planet. Scientific consensus is that greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuels is the main driver of global warming, so to that end we are passionately supportive of all measures to transition to clean renewable energy, and the phasing out of mining, processing and use of all fossil fuels.

The Environmental Impact Assessment

As the CEC is an environmental organisation we will focus on what the consultants, Resource and Land Management Services (RLMS) laughingly refer to as an "Environmental Assessment". I say laughable because it is not an assessment, but rather a series of bland statements on how environmental issues will be approached. That "Environmental Assessment" is a collection of 7 documents, only one of which, the "Hunter Gas Pipeline Construction Readiness" document, actually mentions flora or fauna. That document devotes an entire page to "Flora and Fauna management, and this is for a pipeline corridor section stretching over 500 kilometres.

Despite a stated 'objective' of protecting endangered, vulnerable, rare and threatened flora and fauna, there is a considerable degree of arrogance in the way the flora and fauna management is approached, with no suggestion of the pipeline route being deviated to avoid impacts on threatened species.

Fauna can clearly move out of the way of the proposed construction but, we are assured: "*Suitably qualified fauna handlers will conduct inspections along areas of open trench to rescue and recover fauna within the trench. Wet sacks and fauna ramps will be used to provide shelter for fauna or a means of escape*". Apparently as a bonus the: "*Details of all animals found in the trench (dead or alive presumably) will be recorded and made available to the regulator*". Any threatened flora can simply be relocated.

We assume that at some stage a proper flora and fauna survey will be undertaken. However, in our opinion this cavalier approach to supposedly 'minimising' the impact on threatened species, is simply not good enough.

But why are we even discussing the proposed pipeline?

We are all aware of the latest Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) report, released on 8th October last, which identifies that global greenhouse gas emissions are still rising and on track to reach 1.5 degrees within 15 years and a catastrophic 5 degree rise by century's end, a level which would threaten all life on earth.

According to the report, to limit global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees, would require, "*rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society*". With the IPCC report identifying the urgent need cut net carbon emissions by 45% by 2030 and reduce net carbon emissions to zero by 2050, **why is anyone still contemplating going ahead with new gas production in Australia?**

We are also aware of the September release of the latest national greenhouse gas emissions accounts, which the government quietly released on a Friday afternoon in September, the shadow of the AFL and NRL grand finals. Those figures showed Australia's emissions increased by a massive 1.3% in the year to March 2018, continuing a trend at odds with the government's repeated claim it is on track to meet the target it set at the 2015 Paris climate conference. **Again, why are we even contemplating the building of more gas infrastructure?**

We are aware too of the Science and Policy Institute's Climate Analytics report which found that between 2015 and 2020 the emissions growth from LNG will effectively wipe out the carbon pollution avoided through the 23% renewable energy target. In other words, the emissions reduction needed by Australia, to help prevent the world from suffering catastrophic climate change, has been made impossible due to the emissions, direct and fugitive, from mining the very fossil fuels the use of which are causing the problem. **Even more reason not to build additional gas infrastructure.**

Then there is the Australian Conservation Foundation's report, "The Dirty Truth", released just this week, showing that 90 per cent of the burden of pollution falls on low to middle-income households. However, more to the point is the finding that air pollution from the mining and use of fossil fuels is responsible for an estimated 3,000 premature deaths in Australia every year.

In conclusion

If the above reports are insufficient to persuade the NSW Government to disallow the renewal of the 2009 approval to construct the Hunter gas pipeline, we suggest there is a need for new regulators

We thank the Minister for this opportunity to comment.

Yours sincerely



John Edwards
Honorary Secretary.