

## **EcoNetwork – Port Stephens Inc response to plans for a Newcastle Gas Storage Facility**

Dear Sir/Madam

In response to your call for community comment EcoNetwork - Port Stephens Inc. declares our opposition in principle to the establishment of the Newcastle Gas Storage Facility primarily because it encourages the use of fossil fuels instead of renewable energy sources.

### **In principle opposition to planning and allocating resources to promote fossil fuels**

We oppose the development of facilities anywhere along the supply chain that promote the use of fossil fuels. The notion that natural gas should be an interim fuel between coal/oil and renewables is misinformed and dangerous to the global environment, to current generations and particularly to future generations. We are already witnessing an increase in the frequency and intensity of extreme climatic events.

Given the consensus among of the vast majority of climate change scientists about the extent to which burning fossil fuels contribute to global warming it is imperative that we adopt the fundamental ESD precautionary principle and a responsible approach in terms of risk management. The consensus is that the concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere should be stabilised at 350 ppm (and a 1.5 degree C rise) to prevent overshooting a tipping point that will result in catastrophic results for the global environment, the deaths and displacement of millions of people worldwide and the disappearance of island nations. The current concentration already exceeds 350 ppm and global business as usual is trending at a worst-case scenario of 6 degree C increase by 2100.

The use of natural gas as an “interim fuel” in Australia will contribute to the above scenario, which in Port Stephens will include sea level rise, increasing storm surge, deaths from heat stroke and the destruction of ecosystems. As a conservation and natural heritage community network in Port Stephens it is incumbent on us to oppose any investment in fossil fuel use.

An alternative approach to using fossil fuels is available now and has been fully costed. I refer to the **Zero Carbon Australia 2020 Stationary Energy Plan [ZCA2020 Plan]** – a collaboration between Melbourne University’s Energy Research Institute, the environment group Beyond Zero Emissions and engineers Sinclair Knight Merz. This uses current technologies for Australia to transition to 100% renewable energy within ten years. It shows that all of Australia’s energy needs can be supplied by renewable concentrating solar thermal power and wind, by developing what is relatively simple infrastructure, thus contributing to the global solution as opposed to contributing to the global problem. The decisions that are made now and in the current decadal window of opportunity are critical to our future. Approval of the Newcastle Gas Storage Facility will reflect a lack of political will and a concession to vested financial and media interests.

**In principle opposition to planning and the allocation of resources to facilities that will promote the extraction of coal seam gas (particularly in the Hunter), of fracking methods, and the drilling for gas off the coast during the lifetime of the facility.**

Many indicators point to the fact that the Federal Government is gearing up to use the carbon tax to drive the electricity generation industry to switch from one type of fossil fuel (coal) to another type of fossil fuel (coal seam gas). Coal seam gas still produces CO<sub>2</sub> on combustion and the extraction process has devastating impacts on underground water supplies. The NSW Government has announced that its moratorium on coal seam gas exploration is to be withdrawn after only two months, presenting an opportunity for the proposed AGL “natural gas” storage facility to source gas from coal seams and engage in the environmentally damaging practice of fracking. AGL’s own project justification document says the facility ‘will provide support and distribution infrastructure for the developing coal seam gas production industry in NSW’. We are concerned that this likelihood, along with coastal drilling for gas are part of a plan to make the Hunter region a major player in the rapid transition from coal to coal seam gas for power production.

Again, the precautionary approach should apply. It is incumbent on the developer and the Government to prove that fracking is harmless and if not, that coal seam gas would never be stored in the facility proposed during its lifetime. The same principle applies to the development of offshore gas supplies. Without this undertaking the facility should not be given the go ahead.

**Opposition to the development of the site due the loss of Koala and ecosystem habitat.**

The site for the facility is very diverse with ten vegetation communities, koalas, Squirrel Gliders, New Holland mice and nine threatened fauna species. Earp's Gum, *Eucalyptus parramattensis* subsp. *decadens*, a vulnerable species and a koala feed tree, is present on the site. Sixty-seven trees will be lost due to the proposal. Freshwater Wetlands and Swamp Oak Floodplain Forest Endangered Ecological Communities also exist on the site. The current preferred koala habitat is of good quality and the main buildings making up the gas storage facility will impinge on the Buffer to the Preferred Habitat (2.9ha). Another major concern is that the service road and pipeline cut across sensitive areas and will impact on Preferred Koala Habitat (Swamp Mahogany Forest) and a unique Forest Redgum-Banksia community (*Eucalyptus tereticornis* is a preferred Koala feed tree). In addition a good deal of Supplementary Koala Habitat will be impacted (20ha). Finally a 25m APZ around the facility for bushfire mitigation will directly impact or degrade the Swamp Mahogany forest in the far eastern end of the development area.

For the above reasons, EcoNetwork – Port Stephens Inc opposes the development of the Newcastle Gas Storage Facility.

Kind Regards

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