

I object to this project and believe it should be rejected.

Background

The project is the largest development ever proposed under the modern planning system, and four times the size of the only other two CSG projects assessed and approved in NSW.

Santos proposes up to 850 wells on 425 well pads over 95,000 hectares. This is more than four times the size of either of the previously approved CSG projects in NSW. The proposal includes a gas processing facility for compression dehydration and treatment of gas, a water management facility for storage and treatment of produced water and brine, possible additional power generation on site, continual flaring (burning off of gas) at two locations, an infrastructure corridor through the forest between Leewood and Bibblewindi, expansion of worker accommodation, discharge of waste water into Bohena Creek, irrigation with treated water and landfill burial of tens of thousands of tonnes of salt.

It's huge.

Santos says construction is expected to start in early 2018, with first gas scheduled for 2019/20, but also make clear it has not decided to go ahead with the project at all. If it goes ahead, it will continue for at least 20 years.

Salt

- It will extract over 35 billion litres of toxic groundwater, much of it in the first five years. This water will be treated and in the early years will generate tens of thousands of tonnes of salt, for which there is no safe disposal plan. Peak salt production at Narrabri CSG will be 115 tonnes per day, or two and a half B-double truckloads per day. In the peak year, this would mean the creation of 41,900 tonnes of salt for disposal, which Santos says will take place in landfill

Biodiversity

- The Pilliga is also the largest temperate woodland in New South Wales. Santos proposes clearing nearly 1,000ha of the Pilliga, including habitat for critically endangered Regent honeyeater and for koalas, which are already in decline in the Pilliga. Spread across the whole forest, this clearing will fragment much larger areas of habitat. The gasfield will clear breeding habitat for Pilliga Mouse, which lives nowhere else, and breeding habitat for other wildlife. It will fragment and degrade the forest. Without specific information about where the wells and lines will be located, a proper ecological impact assessment can't be completed. Regardless, the Pilliga is a cherished natural and cultural icon and must be protected from becoming an industrial gasfield.

Groundwater

- The project will cause significant diversion of water from a recharge aquifer of the Great Artesian Basin, which is a water resource relied upon by rural communities across western NSW. Santos' project is expected to remove 37.5GL of groundwater over the life of the gasfield, mostly in the early years. The coal seam needs to be dewatered to release the

gas, but this aquifer lies beneath the Pilliga Sandstone, part of the Great Artesian Basin recharge. Santos' EIS admits that the project will result in a loss of water from the GAB recharge aquifer over time. CSG in Queensland has drawn down GAB aquifers already. We can't afford to risk this crucial resource.

Fugitive emissions

- It will lead to large deliberate and fugitive emissions of methane, adding to climate change.

Cultural

- It will cause more trauma to the regional Aboriginal community because the area of impact is crucially important to the spiritual, cultural and social life of Gamilaraay people.

Justification

- It is not justified: Santos' own coal seam gas export activities in Queensland have caused gas prices to rise and supply to become unpredictable. NSW should respond to this by investing in more reliable and ultimately cheaper renewable energy, not by letting Santos inflict more environmental, social and economic harm.

Economics

- It will cause economic upheaval in Narrabri and put agricultural industries at risk, as well as causing light pollution that will ruin the dark night sky needed by the internationally renowned Siding Spring Observatory.

Social and health impacts:

Santos' social impact assessment is three years old and utterly inadequate. The compendium of health studies produced by the Concerned Health Professionals of New York shows mounting evidence for health damage by unconventional gas operations, including water contamination and respiratory illness. The Government must insist that Santos conduct a proper health impact assessment including modelling exposure pathways, reviewing literature and engagement with the Narrabri community. In Narrabri, this project will have negative impacts on cost-of-living, the labour and housing markets. The latter is cited in as a benefit of the project but it will not benefit low-income renters. The effect of the project on cost-of-living in the Shire needs to be modelled, assessed and considered, as do the labour dynamics of the project.

Closing

I urge the Government to reject this project and make the Great Artesian Basin recharge off-limits to gas mining.

Prof Don White, Woollahra