

Inquiry into “The implementation of the recommendations contained in the Chief Scientist’s Independent Review of Coal Seam Gas Activities in New South Wales”

SUPPLEMENTARY SUBMISSION (14th November, 2019):

The first four Recommendations of the Chief Scientist’s report are grouped under the heading

Intent, communication, transparency and fairness.

According to Recommendation 1, Government should establish:

mechanisms for working closely and continuously with the community, industry, and research organisations on this issue.

This has led to the establishment of the Narrabri Gas Project Community Consultative Committee (CCC)

People for the Plains would like to make a supplementary submission to this inquiry based on relevant actions we have taken since the original closure date for submissions, relevant to Recommendation 1.

At our general meeting on November 11th 2019 we moved a resolution to ‘Temporarily Suspend’ our attendance at the CCC and a letter to this effect was submitted to Chair of the CCC on 12th November 2019. A copy of this letter is included below.

As outlined, People for the Plains has had a delegate on the CCC since its inception and it is a role that we take seriously and actively utilise for a two way communication between the project and the community. Our decision to temporarily suspend attendance at CCC meetings was not taken lightly.

Our reasons are detailed in the attached letter and centre on a perceived changing role of the CCC, weakening its independence and its value to us. In particular we were concerned with what seems to be a decreased interest from the Chair and members in having presentations by government departments and experts. We have further concerns about the independence of the Secretariat, which is provided by the proponent company, Santos. Instances which have elevated our concerns include:

- corrections and inclusions to the draft Communiqué following CCC meetings being called for and presented to the Secretariat, but not being included in the final Communiqué
- a decreased effort by Santos in answering questions posed by the community
- the unexplained removal of our delegate from the communication system of the CCC, which meant we were left off the email list. This problem was not picked up by any CCC protocols and the explanation provided was seriously lacking validity
- continued erosion of proper consultation via the committee, as instanced by the altered wording to the lead-in to each Communiqué. As per the images below, the description was changed in May 2019 from “Chaired by the NSW Land and Water Commissioner, members of the **dialogue** include...” To “Chaired by the NSW Land and Water Commissioner, members of the **committee** include...” (our emphasis). The word dialogue was carefully chosen at the inception of the CCC to reflect an exchange of ideas and opinions. This is seen as the purpose of the CCC and this change of just one word reflects a subtle, yet cumulative erosion of the communicative role of the CCC. Clearly this change was made by someone with access to the Secretariat’s computer and was not verified at any time by the committee members.

Change to the “About the CCC” section of the February 2019 Communiqué to the May 2019 Communiqué, noting the removal of the word “dialogue”.

COMMUNIQUE 30

NARRABRI GAS PROJECT COMMUNITY CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE (CCC)

About the CCC

The Narrabri Gas Project Community Consultative Committee (CCC) brings together community, industry, local and state governments to explore and discuss issues relating to the exploration and extraction of natural gas in the Narrabri Gas Project area.

Chaired by the NSW Land and Water Commissioner, members of the dialogue include Narrabri Shire Councillors, independent community members, senior Santos representatives and senior agency officers from the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC), the Department of Planning and Environment (DPE), and the Environment Protection Authority (EPA).

Summary of 12 February 2019 meeting

COMMUNIQUE 31

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Summary of 14 May 2019 meeting

Extract from the May 2019 Communiqué that clearly shows that the word 'Dialogue', that best describes the purpose and intent of NGPCCC when used as a noun and verb, has been removed and replaced by the word 'committee'

In all, over the last 12 months, we believe the CCC has been reducing its effectiveness as a proper vehicle for consultation, as was its original intent.

The Chief Scientist's Report highlighted the importance of quality consultation and the lack of it at the time. Sadly, five years on and it appears to have deteriorated further.

Recommendations

- 1 - That a new Narrabri Gas Project Community Consultative Committee be established under the Onshore Petroleum Act (not the Mining Act) including an Independent Chair and an independent Secretariat.
- 2 - That consideration be given to allowing members of the public to attend CCC meetings (but not participate), to ensure enhanced transparency and increased participation.

Letter of Temporary suspension of attendance

People for the Plains Inc.
750 Harparary Rd Boggabri 2382 NSW
Email: people4thelplains@gmail.com



Craig Jenkins (hand delivered)
Chair of Narrabri Gasfield CCC
CC: Minister Rob Stokes (email)

11th November 2019

Dear Mr Jenkins,

RE: Temporary suspension of attendance from Narrabri CCC

People for the Plains has provided a delegate to the Narrabri Gas Project Community Consultative Committee (CCC) since its inception. This is a role that we have taken seriously and undertaken voluntarily, in good faith with a high level of commitment.

We understood that the purpose of the CCC was to provide a two-way conduit for information between the Narrabri Gas Project and the community.

Sadly, we have experienced a deterioration in the CCC in recent times to such lengths that we no longer see any value in participating. This has led us to come to the decision as a group, that we will be temporarily suspending our attendance to the CCC.

Our impression is that Santos no longer satisfactorily attempts to address questions from the community. We believe there are in excess of 100 outstanding questions that have not been answered by the company.

Events of the last few weeks has seen communication channels between Santos and our delegate, broken; emails and communiques were not provided to our delegate in recent times. We continue to believe that Santos staff should not be the Secretariat of the CCC as they lack a suitable level of independence for the role.

We have also noticed the lack of interest from the (previous) Chair and other CCC members in receiving presentations from government and research bodies associated with the project, undermining our knowledge level of the project.

We receive regular and thorough reporting from our delegate which is greatly appreciated and valued, and the lack of reporting and answering of questions from Santos, has meant our delegate can no longer provide that level of reporting to our members.

Of late, the committee seems to have callous disregard for the principle purpose and the appropriate procedures of the CCC, to such an extent that we can no longer be involved.

We will keep our seat open on the CCC and are willing to come back at such a time that we receive a written commitment that the committee will resume its purpose and follow applicable processes. Until then, we will suspend our attendance.

Regards

Mr Stuart Murray | President | PH: 02 6792 1457