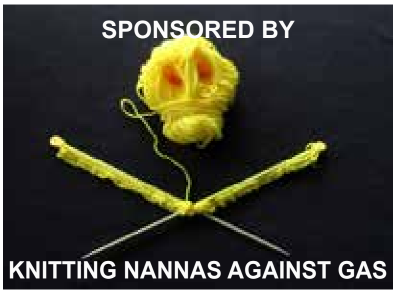

Fossil Fool Bulletin

Fossil fools in the spotlight this week: A resource for people working to end the fossil fuel era in Australia

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FFB 3:15 • 24 MARCH 2020

Vic gasfield benefits exaggerated

As the Victorian Government announces it will allow over 100 gas wells on some of Victoria's prime farmland, Australia Institute analysis of the Government's own Victorian Gas Project Progress report finds the decision is based on misleading claims that exaggerate benefits, understate costs and ignore alternatives.

Roads, pipelines, processing plants: a gasfield invasion threatens Victorian farmland. *Photo: Lock the Gate*

The Government's Victorian Gas Project Progress report reveals only very small benefits for the state even at the largest considered production level:

Despite claims of 6,400 jobs in the Premier's media release, the Victorian Gas Project Progress report claims as few as 57, and at most 204 additional jobs, or 0.006% of the current Victorian workforce.

The increase in Victoria's Gross State Product would be at most 0.17% relative to today and at most only 0.04% of current government revenue.

The report finds the development would not reduce wholesale gas prices or power prices.

At the same time, the Victorian Gas Project Progress report:

- Ignores the vast majority of the greenhouse gas emissions caused by the burning of the gas;
- Ignores cost-effective opportunities to further reduce gas consumption through electrification.

The report claims of local acceptance are based on a survey with a misleading positive bias in the design. Nonetheless, it finds only 9% of people think gas development would improve their region.

"The claims being made by the Victorian Government to justify gas development on some of Victoria's best farmland are highly misleading," said Mark Ogge Principal Adviser at The Australia Institute

"For the Government to claim it will create 6,400 jobs is grossly misleading. Their own research shows there will be as few as 57, and at most 204 more jobs as a result of gas development at any given time and the report acknowledges that it will displace an undisclosed amount of jobs in existing industries.

"The Gas Program Progress Report highlights just how measly the economic benefits will be for turning some of Victoria's best farmland into an industrial gas field.

"There are few if any benefits here for local communities, only downsides. The real beneficiaries are the gas companies.

"Claiming they are banning Coal Seam Gas (CSG) is irrelevant and misleading as there is no CSG in Victoria.

"Just because it is 'conventional gas' makes little difference to the impacts. There could be over 100 wells and all the roads, toxic chemicals, processing plants, pipelines, and toxic water issues that are part and parcel of industrial gas production. These communities will now have no choice but to allow drilling on their land.

"Allowing onshore gas in Victoria is environmentally irresponsible with little or no economic benefits." F

• P2: Covid-19 provides cover for fossil projects

• P3: Remote communities fear infection

P5: This week's fossil news summary

Covid-19 provides cover for NSW coal mine and gasfield plans

NSW Planning Minister Rob Stokes' push for the Independent Planning Commission (IPC) to proceed with public hearings during the covid-19 pandemic is has alarmed groups opposed to the Narrabri gasfield and the Vickery coal mine.

Clare Twomey of the Knitting Nannas Against Gas addresses a protest outside Santos' 2016 AGM in Sydney. Photo: Lock the Gate

Stokes has instructed the IPC to continue with public hearings during the coronavirus crisis.

Lock the Gate NSW spokesperson Georgina Woods said people could not be expected to fully engage in the assessment process of major resource projects during a health crisis.

She called on the Berejiklian Government to suspend the IPC assessments of Narrabri and Vickery until the pandemic was over.

"It is deeply disturbing Planning Minister Rob Stokes expects the Independent Planning Commission to press ahead with a public hearing for controversial projects like the Narrabri gasfield and Vickery coal mine in the context of a global pandemic," she said.

People will miss having say on projects

"The Covid-19 outbreak is upending the lives of people globally and New South Wales is no exception.

People are frightened, and understandably so – the last thing many want to do is gather publicly, or miss out on their opportunity to have their say on these highly damaging projects.

"The Planning Minister cannot possibly expect the Commission can adequately or fairly undertake public consultation in this context.

"People in rural New South Wales have limited internet capacity and in towns and cities we are bracing for further disruption while we put all our efforts into limiting the spread of this virus.

"The Planning Minister needs to put public health and basic fairness first and allow the IPC to suspend its consideration of the Narrabri gasfield and Vickery coal mine until the pandemic has passed and people are able to fully participate, as is our right."

North West Protection Advocacy (NWPA) said the Planning Minister has pitted himself against the many thousands of people, who have submitted, objected, protested and lobbied against coal seam gas for over 10 years, representing over 97% of 22,700 submissions to the Environmental Impact Statement for Santos' Narrabri gasfield.

97% of 22,700 submissions to the EIS for Santos' Narrabri gasfield opposed the project.

"Mr Stokes was under no legislative requirement to trigger a public hearing during this time of crisis (the worst in most peoples' living memory and arguably since World War 2). His Ministerial powers under section 9.1(1) of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* provide that he "may direct" the Independent Planning Commission to initiate a Public Hearing. This discretion has been used irresponsibly and in defiance of the NSW Chief Scientist's recommendations of the prerequisites needed to establish a safe coal seam gas industry in NSW," NWPA said.

"February 2020 savaged the hopes of the industry with a damning report on the unreadiness of regulators to protect the State from the irreversible harms of coal seam gas mining. A Parliamentary Committee chaired by Shooters Farmers and Fishers Mark Banasiak MLC announced that the Government has not fulfilled 14 of the 16 Recommendations made by the NSW Chief Scientist which were the necessary safeguards against an industry notorious for its damage to groundwater, greenhouse gas emissions, human health implications and colossal toxic waste problems."

Environmental crime of the century

NPWA said, "If the coal seam gas industry were to proceed under the present circumstances, it would be the environmental crime of the century. It would risk vast areas of agricultural land dependent on groundwater that communities are 100% reliant upon. Gas expansion also promises to destroy the hopes of Australia achieving greenhouse gas targets this century."

The group has urged people to write to Rob Stokes requesting a Ministerial reply at the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, Locked Bag 5022, Parramatta NSW 2124.

NPWA also suggests emailing the minister via the link

https://lockthegate.good.do/postpone/emailstokes/

and checking his Twitter account @ RobStokesMP and Facebook page: Rob Stokes MP / NSW Planning.

• ***More information is available at***

https://nwprotectionadvocacy.com/

Remote communities fear infection from gas workers

The Central Land Council (CLC) works in some of Australia's most remote country. Photo: CLC

Indigenous residents of the remote NT community of Borroloola are urgently calling on the NT Government to ban gas company workers from travelling through the Gulf and Barkly region during the coronavirus crisis.

Earlier this month, the NT Government approved Imperial Oil and Gas Pty Ltd to drill a gas well for fracking in its petroleum licence area 85km from Borroloola.

The well, which would then be fracked into the future, is approved for drilling in the coming weeks, an operation requiring hundreds of workers in transit and on site in the region.

Remote communities in the NT were closed to outside visitors more than a week ago, with the Northern Land Council suspending all permits for non-essential travel.

Then, last week, the Central Land Council backed the call of the Combined Aboriginal Organisations of Alice Springs to declare the entire Northern Territory a special control area.

Garrwa and Yanyuwa man Gadrian Hoosan said he was concerned for his community's safety, with mining and gas workers seemingly able to continue traveling through the region.

"What is a concern for me is the FIFO workers, we've been worried about them – what if they're affected by Covid-19?

"If there's a problem with tourists coming here, then there's a problem with mine and gas workers flying in from international and interstate areas and not being tested before coming through our regions, that's what worries me."

As of yesterday, the Northern Territory had recorded at least 6 cases of Covid-19.

In a video uploaded to Facebook, Hoosan also called on the Territory Government to redirect funding from fracking operations to the town's local health centre, to ensure vulnerable populations have access to adequate healthcare during the pandemic.

"Why are they spending money on a project that's going to contaminate our water and land when we're already dealing with one problem (Covid-19) already," he said.

"The Chief Minister should have put more money into our local clinic. I don't know why they're pumping money into fracking companies."

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KEPCO should pack up and leave, say Bylong protectors

Plans to build a thermal coal mine on fertile agricultural land in the Bylong Valley are increasingly at odds with new climate policies of the ruling party in South Korea.

The party this week announced a 'Green New Deal' manifesto as an election commitment, which includes a series of policies, such as the discontinuation of coal project financing.

It comes after KEPCO's South Korean parent company announced it had written off the project and reduced the value of land it had acquired in the Bylong Valley for the coal mine to zero.

KEPCO's planned Bylong coal mine was also rejected by the Independent Planning Commission late last year due to its impact on agriculture, underground water, and the climate crisis, however the company has since challenged that decision in court.

A decision on whether the IPC should reconsider its decision to reject the mine is months away, meaning local landholders will continue to face the uncertainty they've been dealing with for many years since the project was first announced.

Bylong Valley Protection Alliance spokesperson Phillip Kennedy said the Australian arm of KEPCO should withdraw its legal challenge and abandon all plans for the coal mine.

"We have been dealing with the uncertainty surrounding this project for long enough," he said.

"KEPCO should pack up and leave. The IPC ruled the Bylong Valley was too important to be sacrificed to a filthy big coal mine.

"If it went ahead, the project would mine 120m tonnes of coal over 25 years - this is utterly inconsistent with the South Korean ruling party's new policy.

"It's clear the South Korean parent company has read the writing on the wall, so why does the Australian arm of KEPCO continue to inflict distress upon local landholders?"

F

David Rowe reproduced with permission: https://www.facebook.com/david.rowe.5070

Inside the news

Adani CEO **Lucas Dow** has let slip the company is planning a bigger mine and wants to combine with other miners to export up to 100 million tonnes (MT) of coal a year from Queensland's Galilee Basin (p5).

Coronavirus is having an impact on the fossil fuel industry. It has halted the sale of a **coal export terminal** (p5-6). Oil and gas **workers have been stood down** (p6) while **Santos** has cut spending and delayed a major project.

Meanwhile, the economic halt in **China** has reduced the country's air pollution dramaticall (p7).

But while an economic slow-down has some benefits for the planet, the virus crisis may deflect attention from fossil fuel developments.

The **Victorian government** has been accused of deliberately using the crisis to **sneak through** an end to the prohibition of onshore oil and gas exploration in the state.

The state has, however, enshrined a **fracking ban** into its constitution (p8).

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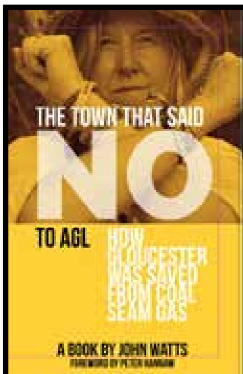

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In the news this week

This week Fossil Fool Bulletin has summarised 5,600 words of news for your convenience.

Click on the links to view original articles. (Subscriptions may be required)

THE ADANI SAGA

https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-03-19/adani-leaked-video-ceo-lucas-dow-at-qld-lnp-fundraiser/12050028

Adani executive Lucas Dow talks up bigger coal mine in leaked video at LNP fundraising event

Josh Robertson, ABC, 19/03/2020

Leaked documents and video suggest Adani is planning a bigger mine and wants to combine with other miners to export up to 100 million tonnes (MT) of coal a year from Queensland's Galilee Basin.

In November 2018 the Indian mining giant announced a "scaled down" 10MT-a-year mine, eventually increasing to 27MT – far less than its original 60MT plan.

A 2019 contract, obtained by the ABC, showed Adani was preparing to build a mine rail link that would start hauling 40MT-a-year but with an "ultimate capacity" of 100MT, assuming other mines went ahead in the basin.

In July last year, Adani Australia chief executive Lucas Dow was recorded speaking at an LNP fundraiser on the Gold Coast where he emphasised Adani was permitted to export up to 60MT.

In the video, obtained by the ABC, an attendee asked Dow how many jobs a 10MT-a-year mine would deliver, Dow replied: "Well, that's the initial phase."

"The one thing we've been very clear on is we're permitted up to 60MT," he said.

In the video, Dow then appeared concerned an audience member was recording his remarks. "Sorry, are you recording that? Or you're ... no? Okay. We're permitted up to 60 million tonnes, so the reality is we've got an opportunity to be able to expand beyond that," Dow said.

The plan to haul up to 100MT a year of Galilee coal by rail is contained in Adani's September 2019 contract for construction camp operations with French mining services giant Sodexo.

Burning 100MT of coal for electricity would emit between 188MT and 243MT a year – more than the entire state of Queensland (158MT) – according to the Climate Council.

Frontlina Action on Coals (FLAC) says, "As the rest of the nation is on lock-down during this pandemic, Adani has made the dangerous decision to allow its employees and contractors to travel hundreds of kilometres from around the country to get to the Carmichael site. This decision puts remote and vulnerable communities, as well as fellow workers in Central QLD at risk, with the spreading of COVID-19 a likely outcome.

"Adani were not following protocol with their employees coming within two metres of these concerned citizens on a public road, even after they asked them to keep their distance." Photo: FLAC

Chris, a Sodexo employee who asked not to be identified, told the ABC he leaked the contract to activists because "from a personal point of view, I don't particularly agree with our servicing that contract".

The Sodexo contract stated there would be three construction camps for Adani's 200km-rail link, housing up to 1,029 workers.

Adani channelled almost a quarter of a million dollars in political donations to the Liberal and National parties last financial year.

https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/activists-demand-marsh-insurance-stop-working-adani

Activists demand Marsh Insurance stop working for Adani

Coral Wynter, Green Left Weekly, 20/03/2020

Climate protesters organised a snap action inside a lavish foyer of Barangaroo where Marsh Insurance Brokers have its Sydney office early on March 5.

As workers were rushing in with their coffees, protesters held up banners demanding that Marsh – one of the largest global insurance brokers – end its association with Adani's Carmichael coal mine project in central Queensland.

Insurance remains a crucial missing piece of financial support and Marsh is helping Adani to find an insurance company.

It is likely that Adani has still not secured an insurer to build its mine and rail line and, without that, it cannot legally carry out the work.

So far 16 global insurers, including some major players in the resources and energy sectors, have ruled out working with Adani mine.

COAL ROCKS ON

https://www.reuters.com/article/brookfield-divest-ment-dbct-idINL4N2B41Q5

Canada's Brookfield halts sale of Australian coal port due to coronavirus – sources

Paulina Duran, Reuters, 11/03/2020

Canada's Brookfield Asset Management has put the sale of its coal export

Dalrymple Bay Coal Terminal. Photo: DBCT

terminal in Australia, the Dalrymple Bay Coal Terminal (DBCT), on hold due to travel restrictions amid the spread of coronavirus, two sources said.

Running a sale process had become impossible given current travel bans due to the global COVID-19 outbreak, the sources said, declining to be identified because they were not allowed to talk to the media.

Indicative bids submitted for the terminal in late February had valued it at over A$2 billion ($1.3 billion), one of the sources said, but the extensive due diligence and site visits required to continue a sale process would be too difficult to perform in the current environment.

https://www.dailymercury.com.au/news/moranbah-coal-dust-danger-underestimated-scientist/3976611/

Moranbah coal dust danger underestimated: scientist

Melanie Whiting, Daily Mercury, 20/03/2020

New research has found Moranbah recorded the second highest rate of PM10 emissions out of the top 20 emissions areas analysed.

PM10 emissions are pollutants smaller than 10 micrometres, which can penetrate into the lungs.

James Cook University Associate Professor Gunther Paul said he found it likely miners' exposure to dangerous coal dust had been underestimated, as the communities they live in were polluted too.

Dr Paul said while the maximum exposure of miners to pollutants at work was mandated by law, this did not take into account the fact they also tended to live nearby, at least part of the time.

"The health of the public at large is impacted by coal mining, but to the extent that miners also live near coal mining operations, their total exposure is currently underestimated," he said.

Dr Paul said surface mining in particular contributed to local air pollution and increased risks for cancer, cardiovascular disease and respiratory disease among nearby communities.

https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/mar/24/push-to-get-taxpayer-funds-for-vales-point-coal-plant-upgrade-rejected

Push to get taxpayer funds for Vales Point coal plant upgrade rejected

Adam Morton, 24/03/2020

A push by power baron Trevor St Baker to access a Morrison government climate policy initiative to pay for an upgrade at a 42-year-old coal power plant has been rejected after a review found it should not qualify.

The Vales Point coal plant in New South Wales was registered with the $2.55bn emissions reduction fund, the "direct action" policy introduced by Tony Abbott and extended by Scott Morrison, in August 2018.

Its owners, Sunset Power International trading as Delta Electricity, wanted to bid for taxpayers' support to help pay for a $14m project to replace turbine blades.

The proposal stalled when the Clean Energy Regulator, which administers the fund, said the company had not provided enough information. It ruled the upgrade would have needed to cut the plant's emissions intensity – how much it emits per unit of electricity generated – below the grid average.

The decision was welcomed by activists and analysts who argue coal plants, which emit substantial greenhouse gases, should not receive climate funding.

But they noted Vales Point was still in line to receive an $11m federal grant, according to a document released in February, before coronavirus delayed the government's budget plans.

Richie Merzian, from the Australia Institute, said the committee's decision showed the value of "truly independent entities" that served the public on climate change.

"Lobbying by coal executives has put much pressure on the government to allow greater access to climate funding for the coal industry," Merzian said. "Fortunately, the independent review committee has made the right choice in maintaining the legal checks and balances that ensure the [fund] is not rorted."

Freedom-of-information documents last year showed the company's consultant, John Short, had suggested to the government it would consider appealing to the administrative appeals tribunal if the regulator's decision was not overturned.

The company bought the plant from the NSW government for just $1m in 2015. It was re-valued at $730m two years later.

OIL & GAS LEAKS

https://www.smh.com.au/business/companies/woodside-stands-down-rig-workers-to-curb-virus-risk-20200320-p54cc7.html

Woodside stands down rig workers to curb virus risk

Nick Toscano, SMH, 20/03/2020

Australian oil and gas giant Woodside has stood down hundreds of offshore contract workers without pay, as it scales back staffing levels on rigs to reduce the risk of a coronavirus outbreak.

Union representatives for workers on Woodside rigs off the north-west coast of Western Australia said the company summarily stood down 410 contract workers.

Woodside boss Peter Coleman said the health and safety of staff and maintaining gas supply to customers were the company's highest priorities.

"To comply with expert health and government guidance we are reducing the number of people at our facilities and working with our contractors, suppliers and communities to minimise the impact of the pandemic," he said.

One worker on board a platform affected by the cuts said the rigs would be run on a "skeleton staff" in coming months, reducing the workforce on some platforms by more than 50% in a bid to lower workplace density and minimise the risk of an infection.

"They've just dumped us, no sign of goodwill," said the worker, who asked not to be named.

"I'm a single dad, we have been living pay cheque to pay cheque and now I don't know when my next pay is going to be."

"Today's decision by Woodside is maybe the most heartless corporate response we've seen to the COVID-19 crisis to date," AWU national secretary Daniel Walton said.

"To just bring down the axe on 400 workers without a whisper of consultation, or the suggestion of special arrangements, is unconscionable."

Woodside competitors including Shell and INPEX have made commitments to provide additional payments and flexibility in response to coroanvirus-related staffing cutbacks on their offshore platforms in recent weeks.

https://www.theage.com.au/business/companies/time-for-discipline-santos-cuts-back-as-oil-crash-wipes-billions-20200323-p54cxf.html

'Time for discipline': Santos cuts back as oil crash wipes billions

Nick Toscano, Age, 23/03/2020

Santos, one of the nation's largest oil and gas producers, has slashed its spending by $550 million and delayed a major new project in northern Australia as the worsening coronavirus outbreak and oil price crash rock the global energy industry.

Producers in Australia and worldwide have wiped billions of dollars from investment budgets in the past week in order to survive a flood of oil coming onto the market due to Saudi Arabia and Russia ramping up output at the same time as the coronavirus pandemic causes a downturn in oil demand.

Santos chief executive Kevin Gallagher on Monday said the ASX-listed company would cut its full-year capital spending by 38%, or $550 million, and delay making a final investment decision on its $7 billion Barossa gas project off the coast of Darwin until business conditions improved.

https://www.cairnspost.com.au/news/townsville/plans-for-lng-plant-at-abbot-point-shelved/news-story/47a97607c1076c041e84585676113eae

Plans for LNG plant at Abbot Point shelved

Chris Lees, Townsville Bulletin, 21/03/2020

A small-scale LNG project at the Port of Abbot Point has been quietly shelved.

In 2014, Energy World Corporation revealed plans to build a mid-scale LNG plant and ship loading facility at Abbot Point.

However, on March 12 this year the proposal "lapsed" as federal environmental assessment had not progressed.

A Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment spokeswoman said in May 2014 the project was determined as a controlled action which meant it required further assessment and approval under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act before it could proceed.

In March 2018 the department wrote to Energy World Corporation asking for information within 20 business days so the assessment of the project should continue.

"No response was received from Energy World Corporation within this time frame," the spokeswoman said.

LNG analyst Graeme Bethune, the chief executive officer of EnergyQuest said given the time frames that had passed he could not see the project happening.

CLIMATE CRISIS

https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/mar/23/coronavirus-pandemic-leading-to-huge-drop-in-air-pollution

Coronavirus pandemic leading to huge drop in air pollution

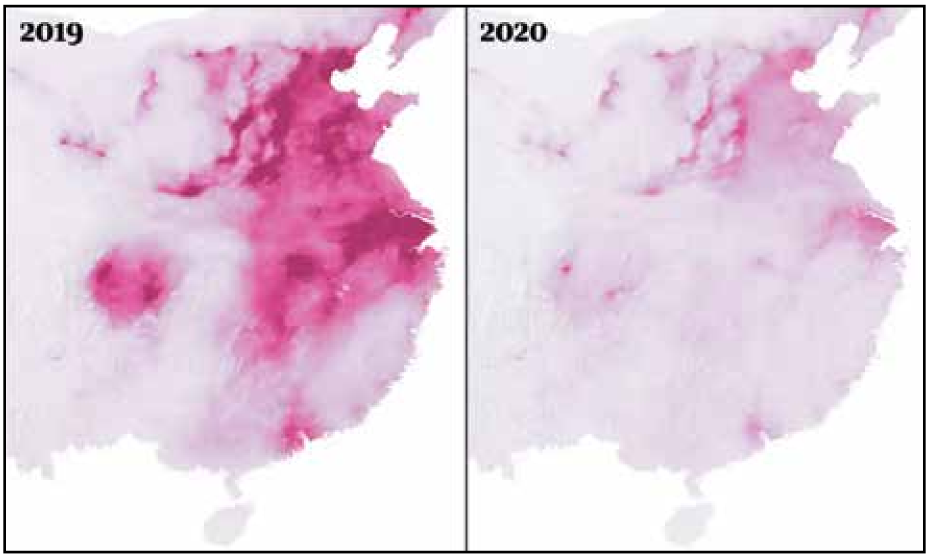
Jonathan Watts & Niko Kommenda, Guardian, 23.03/2020

The coronavirus pandemic is shutting down industrial activity and temporarily slashing air pollution levels around the world, satellite imagery from the European Space Agency shows.

One expert said the sudden shift represented the "largest scale experiment ever" in terms of the reduction of industrial emissions.

Readings from ESA's Sentinel-5P satellite show that over the past six weeks, levels of nitrogen dioxide (NO2) over cities and industrial clusters in Asia and Europe were markedly lower than in the same period last year.

While not a greenhouse gas itself, the pollutant originates from the same activities and industrial sectors that are responsible for a large share of the world's carbon emissions and that drive global heating.



Pollution levels in China 2019, left, and 2020. *Graphic: Guardian Visuals/ESA data*

Farmers say they feel demoralised by the Victorian governments decision to lift an onshore gas exploration ban. *Photo: ABC*

https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/mar/23/electric-cars-produce-less-co2-than-petrol-vehicles-study-confirms

Electric cars produce less CO2 than petrol vehicles, study confirms

Fiona Harvey, Guardian, 24/03/2020

Electric vehicles produce less carbon dioxide than petrol cars across the vast majority of the globe – contrary to the claims of some detractors, who have alleged that the CO2 emitted in the production of electricity and their manufacture outweighs the benefits.

Paul Monks, professor of air pollution at the University of Leicester, predicted there will be important lessons to learn.

“We are now, inadvertently, conducting the largest-scale experiment ever seen,” he said.

“Are we looking at what we might see in the future if we can move to a low-carbon economy? Not to denigrate the loss of life, but this might give us some hope from something terrible.

“To see what can be achieved.”

The finding is a boost to governments seeking to move to net zero carbon emissions, which will require a massive expansion of the electric car fleet. A similar benefit was found for electric heat pumps.

Scientists from the universities of Exeter, Nijmegen and Cambridge conducted lifecycle assessments that showed that even where electricity generation still involves substantial amounts of fossil fuel, there was a CO2 saving over conventional cars and fossil fuel heating.

FOSSIL POLITICS

https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-03-18/farmers-label-decision-to-lift-gas-ban-under-coronavirus-sneaky/12066000

Gas exploration green light during coronavirus emergency ‘sneaky’, Victorian farmers say

Rio Davis, ABC, 18/03/2020

Victorian farmers say the State Government’s decision to reinstate onshore conventional gas exploration during a coronavirus state of emergency is calculated and “sneaky”. Premier Daniel Andrews said the new gas supplies would be reserved for Victorians.

Companies that wanted to drill for gas on private land would have to strike agreements with landholders.

Andrews said production of the resource could generate more than $310 million annually for regional economies.

Michael Greenham, a beef farmer from Dartmoor near the Otway Basin gas reserve, said he was “annoyed, frustrated and demoralised” by the decision.

“It’s a political and deliberate decision to hide the announcement, three months earlier than required, in amongst the pandemic situation,” he said.

The resumption of conventional onshore gas exploration was introduced to Parliament at the same time as the Government introduced legislation to enshrine the fracking ban into the state constitution.

Climate Council senior researcher Tim Baxter said the State Government was “sliding back in behind” the fossil fuel industry.