



Fossil Fool Bulletin

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

Fossilfool.com.au

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Amidst the pandemic, koalas are quietly sold out for coal

By Jonathan Moylan
Greenpeace Australia Pacific

Over the weekend of April 4-5, the federal government quietly announced a significant change to the way that decisions around major coal and gas projects get made, with big implications for Australia's threatened species and ecological communities, including our iconic koala.

During the Covid-19 crisis, Greenpeace will be keeping an eye on ongoing corporate lobbying by fossil fuel companies that puts our climate and environment at risk while people are physically distancing.

Fossil fuel co's exploiting crisis to push extreme anti-environment agenda

While most people have put public health first and are staying at home, corporate lobbying has not only continued, but fossil fuel companies appear to be exploiting the crisis to push an extreme anti-environment agenda. And koalas are in the firing line.

Koalas are adorable creatures – they sleep during the day and can travel vast distances at night, searching for leaves to forage on. However, many of their favourite feed trees are now in critically endangered ecosystems that have been put at risk of extinction by bulldozers, a drying climate and increasingly severe bushfires.

The longer the distance between habitat areas, the further these furry



*Koala, Marom Creek, NSW.
Photo: Eve Sinton*

creatures have to travel, and this can cause koalas to become exhausted or dehydrate. Recent research by WWF Australia has suggested that koala numbers in NSW have dropped by between a third and two-thirds over the past twenty years.

Coal miners bulldoze habitat

One of the koala's favourite ecosystems is a critically endangered ecological community called White Box-Yellow Box-Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodland and Derived Native Grassland,

which has suffered heavy losses as coal mining companies have bulldozed some of the last parts of this ecosystem in recent years.

In years gone by, mining used to involve sending people down a hole with a pick-axe, but as mining companies dig to deeper and more expensive coal seams, more destructive open cut coal mining, which involves mass bulldozing and open-air blasting with explosives, has become the new norm as companies seek to cut costs.

In 1999, the Howard Government introduced a federal law called the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act in recognition of the need to reverse the huge losses of Australia's incredible biodiversity and the ongoing march of species and ecosystems towards extinction. The Act makes it illegal to do anything that is likely to have significant impacts on threatened species and ecosystems, with penalties of up to seven years' jail.

Predictably, the Act has always been unpopular with mining companies, who see biodiversity protection as a barrier to profit. When the law was first written, mining companies and developers managed to secure an escape clause that allows the Minister to allow destruction of threatened species habitat under exceptional conditions, subject to strict environmental conditions. Unfortunately, instead of being used sparingly, that clause has been used thousands of times to justify environmental damage. For over a

• Continued p2

• P2: Santos boss sells off company shares

• P3: Offshore oil & gas emit more methane

P4: Coal mines kick up 61% more dust

Koalas sold out for coal under cover of virus

• Continued from p1

decade, mining companies have been pushing for environmental decisions to be handed over to state governments, who depend more heavily on royalty revenue.

Over that weekend, while most people were nervously checking the spread of the coronavirus, the federal government gave the coal industry part of what they wanted, by announcing a change to a bilateral agreement between the Federal and NSW Government about environmental assessment.

The most significant part of the announcement involved the most controversial part of the mine assessment process, which is a practice called offsetting.

Miners required to offset destruction

In theory, if a mining company wants the government to agree to a mine that would lead to significant destruction of threatened habitat, they need to prove they have done everything possible to avoid, mitigate and offset the damage – in that order. Avoid means that if the company doesn't "need" to destroy part of an ecosystem, they shouldn't. Mitigate means that if they are causing damage, they should reduce their impact as far as possible.

Offsetting is meant to be used as a last resort, but in practice, the use of offsetting is widespread. In 2014, a Senate inquiry unearthed huge scandals in biodiversity offsetting, including misleading claims by companies, phantom offsets, and even companies mining areas that were already set aside as offsetting by another project.

The inquiry found that critically endangered ecological communities can't sustain any further loss, and recommended that they should never be available for offsets. Unfortunately, the federal government has still not implemented the recommendations of that inquiry.

So, what is an offset anyway? The basic idea is that if a company is destroying threatened ecosystems, they need to buy replacement habitat for the animals that depend on it, like the koala. The aim is to encourage those animals to move to a new area, but the reason it's a last resort option is that the habitat has to already

exist.

The principles of offsetting are that the replacement habitat has to be the same ecosystem, in as good as or better condition as the ecosystem under threat, immediately available, and the purchase of the offset needs to give it better protection than it otherwise would have had.

No legal consequences for sending in the bulldozers

Under this weekend agreement, mining companies will now be able to use a system where instead of being required to look for and buy replacement habitat, they will be able to pay the NSW government to do the job for them. In practice, if the government can't immediately find replacement habitat, there won't be legal consequences for mining companies who send in the bulldozers, as long as they've paid the fund.

Unfortunately, nobody told the koalas that they might have to wait around a few years before the government finds a new home and food source for them. In situations where an ecosystem has been so heavily cleared that it's impossible to find enough replacement habitat, like with White Box-Yellow Box-Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodland and Derived Native Grassland, which you'll remember is a favourite koala home, the process can become absurd.

The mining industry doesn't like the federal environmental law, and we agree, but for a completely different reason. The fact is that the federal law is just not strong enough to prevent extinction, and that's why we need a new generation of environmental laws. While this weekend's announcement was about environmental assessment, the fossil fuel industry wants the government to go further and also hand final decision-making power to the states. It's critical that we don't let that happen.

We'll keep fighting for environmental laws that work, and watching out for threats to koalas, but it will take all of us together to demand the Government put our precious ecosystems ahead of corporate greed. Let your friends and family know what our government are trying to get away with in a time of crisis.

Santos boss sells off \$2.2m in shares

Santos Limited MD, CEO & Director, Kevin Gallagher, recently sold a whopping AU\$2.2m worth of stock at a price of \$4.29 per share. That sale reduced his total holding by 26% which is hardly insignificant, says Simply Wall Street.

"In fact, the recent sale by Kevin Gallagher was the biggest sale of Santos shares made by an insider individual in the last twelve months, according to our records. So, it's clear an insider wanted to take some cash off the table, even below the current price of AU\$4.61," the publication said.

"The stark truth for Santos is that there has been more insider selling than insider buying in the last three months. Zooming out, the longer term picture doesn't give us much comfort. On the plus side, Santos makes money, and is growing profits. Insiders own shares, but we're still pretty cautious, given the history of sales."

Simply Wall Street said there were four warning signs for Santos that people should check out before buying stock.

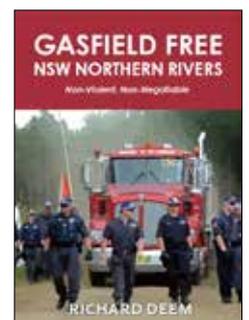
They are:

- High level of debt;
- Unstable dividend track record
- Highly volatile share price over last three months;
- Significant insider selling over the past three months.

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Air sampling shows offshore oil and gas platforms release twice as much methane than estimated

University of Michigan

Offshore energy-producing platforms in US waters of the Gulf of Mexico are emitting twice as much methane, a greenhouse gas, than previously thought, according to a new study from the University of Michigan.

Researchers conducted a first-of-its-kind pilot-study sampling air over offshore and gas platforms in the Gulf of Mexico. Their findings suggest the federal government's calculations are too low.

U-M's research found that, for the full US Gulf of Mexico, oil and gas facilities emit approximately one-half a teragram of methane each year, comparable with large emitting oil and gas basins like the Four Corners region in the southwest US. The effective loss rate of produced gas is roughly 2.9%, similar to large onshore basins primarily focused on oil, and significantly higher than current inventory estimates.

Methane leaked and vented offshore

Offshore harvesting accounts for roughly one-third of the oil and gas produced worldwide, and these facilities both vent and leak methane.

Until now, only a handful of measurements of offshore platforms have been made, and no aircraft studies of methane emissions in normal operation had been conducted.

Each year the EPA issues its US Greenhouse Gas Inventory, but its numbers for offshore emissions are not produced via direct sampling.

The study, published in *Environmental Science and Technology*, identified three reasons for the discrepancy between EPA estimates and their findings:

- Errors in platform counts: Offshore facilities in state waters, of which there are in excess of 1,300, were missing from the US Greenhouse Gas Inventory.
- Persistent emissions from shallow-water facilities, particularly those primarily focused on natural gas, are higher than inventoried.
- Large, older facilities situated in shallow waters tended to produce episodic, disproportionately high spikes of methane emissions. These facilities,



Photo: Offshore Technology

which have more than seven platforms apiece, contribute to nearly 40% of emissions, yet consist of less than 1% of total platforms. If this emission process were identified, it could provide an optimal mitigation opportunity, the researchers said.

Large discrepancies revealed

Eric Kort, a U-M associate professor of climate and space sciences and engineering, said EPA officials are already making adjustments to correct their count of offshore platforms operating in the Gulf of Mexico. But emissions estimates, particularly for shallow waters, still need adjustments.

"We have known onshore oil and gas production often emits more methane than inventoried. With this study we show that this is also the case for offshore production, and that these discrepancies are large," Kort said. "By starting to identify and quantify the problem, with a particular focus on larger shallow water facilities, we can work towards finding optimal mitigation solutions."

In addition, those shallow-water discrepancies warrant further investigation, Kort added, since deep water facilities may be sending some of the oil and gas they produce via pipeline to others located closer to shore.

U-M's team conducted its sampling in 2018 with Scientific Aviation using a small research plane with enough room for a pilot and passenger in the two front seats, as well as scientific gear where there normally would be two rear two seats.

Tubes along the wings of the plane drew in air that was pumped to the equipment for analysis of the amount of methane included as well as wind speed. Circling a single platform gives researchers a better idea of how much methane that single source is emitting.

In addition to 12 individual facilities, the flights also covered larger geographical areas. Flying downwind from clusters of five to 70 oil and gas facilities, and taking similar measurements, researchers can evaluate how well inventory estimates compare with large numbers of platforms.

"By measuring emissions from both individual facilities as well as many dozens of facilities we can compare results, evaluate different inventories, and generate a more statistically robust estimate of total emissions from the US Gulf of Mexico," said Alan Gorchoff Negron, lead author on the study and a PhD candidate in climate sciences at U-M.

As a pilot study, Kort said the research is promising but has gaps. Greater statistical sampling and identification of the cause of high emissions can guide mitigation and improve reported emissions.

To further the work and fill in these gaps, new aerial sampling is in the works funded by the Alfred P Sloan Foundation. The project, titled *Flaring and Fossil Fuels: Uncovering Emissions & Losses (F³UEL)*, will mean more flights later over the next three years over the Gulf of Mexico, Alaska and California.

Dust in the wind: air pollution up 61% in 10 years

Australia's coal mines have seen a 61% increase in PM10 particles during the past 10 years, according to analysis from Environmental Justice Australia.

Predictably, coal mining regions of Central Queensland, North West NSW, and the Hunter were home to mines producing the most particulate pollution.

Of note is Whitehaven's Maules Creek coal mine, which, since construction began in 2014, has produced a considerable amount of dust, with more than seven million kilograms recorded last year alone.

Other mines in the North West also recorded increases in dust levels over five years, including Boggabri coal mine (23%), and Tarrawonga Coal Mine (9%).

Similarly, several Hunter Valley coal mines recorded increases in dust levels over five years, such as Yan-cao Moolarben Coal Operations at Ulan (136%), Mt Owen Mine at Ravensworth (37%), Hunter Valley Operations – Coal and Allied (9%), Bulga Coal Surface and Underground Operations (12%), and Bengalla Operations – Coal & Allied (14%).

Adverse health outcomes

According to NSW Health, PM10 – also known as “coarse particles” could be associated with adverse health effects, such as:

- cough;
- wheeze, or worsening of asthma;
- increased need for medications (eg puffers, antibiotics);
- increased breathlessness;
- heart problems.

Singleton doctor Bob Vickers, from Doctors for the Environment Australia, said, “We are being told time and time again by the mines themselves, and the regulatory bodies, that best practice methods are being used to control air pollution.

“Clearly this isn't the case. The children of the Hunter Valley already have unfairly higher rates of asthma than children in other parts of the country.

“We're now in the middle of a respiratory virus pandemic, and now our airways and hearts have been weakened by this long-term exposure to air



Coal dust at Queensland's Peak Downs mine. Photo: Robert Rough/SMH

pollution. There is no better time to take serious action to reduce pollution than now.”

Garden and water supply contaminated

Ros Druce, who lives on her family's farm at Maules Creek said she had noticed an increase in coal dust since the mine opened, particularly its effects on her garden and rainwater supply.

“My shrubs including geraniums, which are nearly impossible to kill, a lot of them suffered severely during the drought and have died even though I was continuing to water them.

“When I inspected them, I found coal dust on the leaves and because the leaves of geraniums face up, they were collecting the dust.

“I also have to constantly clean the gutters due to all the fallout from the mine, prior to any sign of rain, otherwise all that black dirty stuff ends up in the rainwater tank when it does rain.”

Ms Druce said the NSW EPA also conducted a coal dust analysis in an enclosed barbecue area on the property, which revealed 10-15% coal dust was gathered.

Lock the Gate Alliance spokesperson Georgina Woods said people in the Hunter, particularly in the Singleton area, had long been complaining of increased air pollution.

She urged the NSW Environmental Protection Agency to add pollution from coal mining to its “load based licencing” scheme.

“This increase in air pollution across the nation is deeply concerning because we know it has an impact on people's health,” Woods said.

“We urge the NSW Government to add particulate and other pollution from coal mines to its load based licencing scheme so the companies creating this pollution pay the cost of it. Putting a price on pollution will focus the attention of mine operators on how to clear the air.

“It is a major flaw in the scheme that coal mines are not required to pay for the same pollution that other industries, which create less of it, are having to pay for. Coal mining is among the biggest contributors to PM10 particles in the state.”

State pollution figures:

New South Wales

Delta Electricity reported alarming increases in emissions from their Vales Point coal-fired power station on the Central Coast of New South Wales, including a 121% increase in coarse particle emissions (PM10) and a 181% increase in deadly fine particle emissions (PM2.5). PM2.5 from Vales Point has increased 3000% since 2012-13. While the power station generated 63% more energy in 2018-19 than in 2012-13, this does not explain a 3000% increase in pollution. This is a matter the NSW EPA should investigate.

Eraring, Bayswater and Mt Piper are the second, third and fourth biggest

US study finds air pollution exposure linked to 15% increase in coronavirus death rates

CoalWire reports that a study by researchers at the Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health has found that an increase of just one microgram per cubic metre of PM2.5 fine particle air pollution in the US is associated with a 15 per cent increase in the death rate of those infected with coronavirus.

The study examined coronavirus deaths up to April 4 in 3,000 counties across the US which account for 98% of the population.

The study took account of smoking, obesity, poverty and other factors.

While the link between long-term air pollution exposure and higher death rates has been well documented, the new study estimates that this increase is 20 times higher for COVID-19 deaths.

The study authors argue the results indicate the need for additional precautions for people living in areas of high pollution and the enforcement of air pollution standards.

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Dust in the wind: coal mines up by 61% in 10 yrs

• Continued from p4

power station emitters of SO2 in the country.

The NPI highlights significantly increased emissions of sulfur dioxide (SO2) from NSW power stations. The Liddell, Eraring and Mt Piper power stations increased SO2 emissions by 10%, 15% and 20% respectively.

Bayswater is in the top three polluters for SO2 and NOx. The NSW government approved the expansion of Bayswater power station without requiring pollution controls to be installed (as recommended by pollution control experts).

There are no permanent, public air quality monitoring stations near the Eraring or Mt Piper power stations so local residents don't know what they're breathing.

Victoria

Fine particle pollution (PM2.5) emissions from EnergyAustralia's Yallourn power station in Victoria increased by 82%. This is even though Yallourn had one of its generating units offline for maintenance during the year.

Yallourn's pollution control equipment is currently the focus of legal action initiated by Environmental Justice Australia in the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT).

Yallourn and Loy Yang A are the second and third biggest emitters of PM2.5 in the nation, with 1,372,757kgs

and 531,054kgs, respectively. Neither have fabric bag filters to capture 99% of this pollution. All the NSW power stations have fabric bag filters installed and so emit less than half of Loy Yang and less than a quarter of Yallourn. Even though Loy Yang B is very small in terms of energy output, it still emits almost twice as much PM2.5 as Eraring, which is the biggest power station in Australia.

Loy Yang A is the biggest power station emitter of SO2 in the country, with 46,065,106kgs.

The three Victorian power stations are by far the biggest emitters of mercury in the nation. Loy Yang B is the biggest emitter in the country despite being one of the smallest power stations! Combined they emit more than 1,000kgs of Mercury. The next eight biggest power stations in Australia combined emit less than 500kgs.

Queensland

The biggest power station polluter of PM2.5 in the nation is Tarong (QLD), by an astronomical amount, with 1,860,738kgs. It is not fitted with fabric bag filters to capture 99% of this pollution.

Gladstone and Stanwell (QLD) are the two biggest power station emitters of NOx in the nation, with 34,901,400kgs and 31,507,340kgs, respectively.

Particle pollution emissions PM2.5 from Gladstone power station increased by 23%.

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Call to prosecute Woodside over CO2

Environmentalists are calling for Woodside Petroleum to be prosecuted, as new documents reveal systemic compliance breaches on carbon pollution across both of its Western Australian liquified natural gas (LNG) facilities.

Conservation Council of WA (CCWA) Director, Piers Verstegen said that data released by the Australian Government's Clean Energy Regulator reveal that Woodside has breached its already overly generous Safe-guard Limit for the country's oldest and most inefficient LNG facility – the North West Shelf facility.

"An Annual Compliance report for Woodside's Pluto LNG facility released this week also suggests the company is failing to comply with state government requirements to offset pollution from this facility," said Verstegen.

Cynical marketing exercise

"These two revelations demonstrate that Woodside's claims the company is taking action on climate change are nothing more than a cynical marketing exercise."

The revelations come as Woodside faces investor resolutions on climate change and carbon disclosure at its April 30 Annual General Meeting.

The resolutions reflect serious shareholder concerns over the company's lack of transparency about its carbon pollution and lobbying efforts against action on climate change.

"If Woodside cannot even comply with its basic regulatory requirements on carbon pollution from its existing facilities, the company certainly cannot be trusted to manage emissions from its proposed Burrup Hub expansion which would be the most polluting project in Australia's history," Verstegen said.

Australian government figures reveal that Woodside's WA LNG operations released nine million tons of carbon pollution across its two WA LNG facilities, making it WA's second most polluting company after fellow gas producer Chevron.

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



Inside the news

Coronavirus dominated the media to the exclusion of most fossil fuel news this week.

But as our front page reports, the **fossil fools** are quick to take advantage of the situation wherever possible.

Some people, such as **Adam Bandt** of the Greens, hope the virus will give us a chance to re-set environment policies for the benefit of the planet (p9).

Others, such as energy minister **Angus Taylor**, are using the cover of Covid-19 to push forward with anti-environmental agendas (p8).

Australia's booming LNG industry now hangs in the balance, as oil prices plummet. Those **six LNG production trains in Gladstone** depend on an oil price considerably higher than current levels, and risk becoming stranded assets (p8-9).

Meanwhile, vulnerable central Queensland mining communities fear **fly-in-fly-out (FIFO)** coal mine workers will bring Coronavirus with them (p6). But still, **Adani** presses on with work on its mine and railway.



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In the news this week

This week Fossil Fool Bulletin has summarised 6,600 words of news for your convenience. [Click on the links](#) to view original articles. (Subscriptions may be required)

COAL ROCKS ON

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/apr/14/central-queensland-locals-fear-coronavirus-outbreak-from-remote-workers>

Central Queensland locals fear coronavirus outbreak from remote workers

Ben Smee, Guardian, 14/04/2020

Community leaders in central Queensland say they fear it is now “too late” to impose tougher restrictions on the mass movements of workers heading to isolated mining communities, after the first coronavirus case was confirmed of a Bowen Basin coalminer.

Locals in towns including Moranbah, Clermont and Emerald have told Guardian Australia they are increasingly anxious that large numbers of remote workers continue to cycle through camps and mine sites on a weekly basis. Some are refusing shifts out of concern for their health.

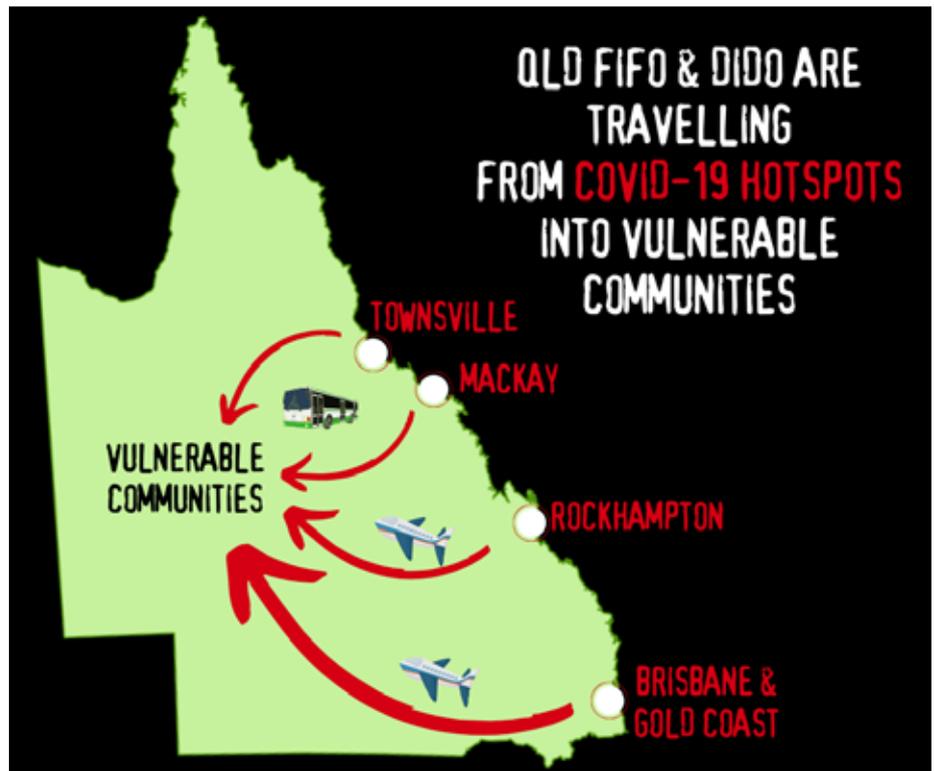
BHP confirmed on Friday that a Rockhampton-based worker at the BHP-Mitsubishi Alliance Blackwater mine had tested positive for Covid-19. He was last at the mine site on 1 April.

The CFMEU mining and energy division’s Queensland president Stephen Smyth has raised concerns about “multiple points of potential cross-contamination”, including on machinery, transport to mine sites, mess facilities and camp accommodation.

The Queensland government this month closed its borders to non-essential fly-in workers, but large numbers continue to cycle through communities from Brisbane, the Gold Coast, Townsville, Mackay and Rockhampton.

Many locals are fearful of the impact of any coronavirus outbreak in a remote location and want the regular stream of fly-in and drive-in workers stopped.

In Moranbah, for instance, there are seven hospital beds, two ventilators and no intensive care unit.



OIL & GAS LEAKS

<https://www.nvi.com.au/story/6718440/mega-narrabri-csg-project-delayed-by-covid-19/>

Narrabri coal seam gas project held up by coronavirus, as green groups says it's concerned about planning process

Andrew Messenger, Namoi Valley Independent, 12/04/2020

The massive Narrabri coal seam gas project is set to be delayed due to fears of coronavirus slowing the development application process.

But a green group said it's concerned the independent planning commission will hold public hearings for the project despite the virus.

It's expected that hundreds of residents will want to have their say on the mega-project, which involves drilling over 850 coal seam wells in the Pilliga forest near Narrabri.

But with Australia's strict social distancing rules, it's still unclear how they will get the chance to do that safely.

Green group Lock the Gate, which opposes the project, said they want the approval process paused until the COVID-19 pandemic has passed.

NSW coordinator Georgina Woods said an online hearing wouldn't suit many

of the people who would be directly affected by the project. Many opponents are elderly and may not possess the computer literacy skills to participate fully, she said.

In a statement, the Independent Planning Commissions said public health and safety is its first priority.

A spokesperson for the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment said that the IPC is “currently developing practices and procedures to enable interested stakeholders to have their say on projects, via video conferencing and written submissions, for example.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/apr/13/australias-booming-lng-industry-stalls-after-fall-in-oil-prices-amid-coronavirus>

Australia's booming LNG industry stalls after fall in oil prices amid coronavirus

Adam Morton, Guardian, 13/04/2020

The extraordinary growth in Australia's liquefied natural gas (LNG) industry, the main cause of recent rises in national greenhouse gas emissions, has stalled indefinitely, with decisions on more than \$80bn of investments delayed due to a collapsed oil price sunk by coronavirus and a geopolitical price war.

STOP WATER MINING THE NEXT RESOURCES BATTLE



The unprecedented crash had already prompted oil and gas giants to defer investment decisions on projects including Woodside's massive Burrup Hub expansion off the Western Australian coast and Santos' \$7bn Barossa project 300km north of Darwin. A decision on the first parts of the Burrup Hub expansion, including a \$17bn development of the Sarborough gas field, has been pushed to 2021.

Calls on Barossa and the largest section of the proposed Burrup Hub, a \$30bn development of the untapped Browse gas field involving Woodside, Shell and BP, have been deferred to an unnamed date.

In inland gas exploration, Origin Energy has paused exploration drilling for its unconventional gas project in Northern Territory's Beetaloo Basin.

Analysts said while prices were expected to rebound, the pace and scale of recovery were near impossible to forecast and may not reach the level required to justify new LNG investments for years, if at all.

The fall in the oil price is yet to fully hit existing Australian gas projects as it takes about three months for changes in the crude benchmark to affect LNG contracts, but hundreds of oil and gas workers have been laid off or stood down as companies slashed planned investment this year.

Tim Buckley, from the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis, said whatever happened the price plunge meant Australia's LNG industry was unlikely to ever again top \$50bn in LNG exports. He said it would increasingly struggle to compete with renewable energy with a far lower marginal cost.

CLIMATE CRISIS

<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/coronavirus-tipped-to-trigger-record-fall-in-global-emissions-20200413-p54jdf.html>

Coronavirus tipped to trigger record fall in global emissions

Mike Foley, SMH, 13/04/2020

Global carbon emissions are tipped to fall 6% this year, more than during any previous economic crisis or war, led by a plunge in fuel consumption as the coronavirus hits economic activity and travel.

But experts say that won't be enough to achieve the Paris Agreement's ambition of limiting global warming to as close to 1.5 degrees as possible.

Climate change publisher Carbon Brief says, "The coronavirus crisis could trigger the largest ever annual fall in CO2 emissions in 2020, more than during any previous economic crisis or period of war."

Since the outbreak began, worldwide demand for petrol has fallen 50% and jet fuel 70%.

Pep Canadell, a senior research scientist for CSIRO and the executive director of the Global Carbon Project, said, "A 7% emissions reduction is required every single year to limit warming to 1.5 degrees – which also means net zero emissions just before the middle of the century."

FOSSIL POLITICS

<https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/news/politics/2020/04/11/angus-taylor-energy-projects-push/15865272009679>

Angus Taylor's energy projects push

Mike Seccombe, Saturday Paper, 11/04/2020

It is a federal government program for which there appears to exist no constitutional or legislative authority, which has no established guidelines for assessing projects and an opaque process for allocating millions of taxpayer dollars.

It's not sports rorts. It's something called the Underwriting New Generation Investment (UNGI) program and it's the baby of the federal Energy minister, Angus Taylor.

And in recent weeks, as the attention of the nation's media and populace has been focused on the Covid-19 crisis, it moved a couple of steps forward.

One step was the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the Commonwealth and New South Wales governments, which encompassed a broad range of energy initiatives, not all of them bad in environmental terms.

But buried in the various attached schedules to the agreement are measures designed to prop up coal-fired electricity generators and weaken environmental protections.

Schedule F is particularly interesting, promising Commonwealth support through UNGI for three power generation projects in the state – one of them the very old, very dirty Vales Point coal power station owned by Delta Energy, whose chairman is Trevor St Baker, one of the country's most generous political donors, mostly to the Liberals and Nationals.

While Australia's attention has been consumed by the coronavirus pandemic, projects and policymaking has continued elsewhere, largely unscrutinised. Indeed, the crisis has provided cover and a convenient excuse for some contentious, alarming or outright dodgy decisions – particularly on the issues of environment, climate and energy.

The Victorian government maintains the increased gas mining will increase the state's greenhouse gas emissions by only 0.1 to 0.3%. But as an analysis by The Australia Institute points out, this includes only the emissions from the extraction process, not those from the actual burning of the gas. Thus, the state's figures are understated by almost 90%.

Benefits and special deals done for the resources sector under the cover of Covid-19, fossil fuel extraction have been deemed a "critical industry", even as workers in other sectors of the economy have been instructed to stay home to limit the spread of the disease.

It is somewhat unsurprising, given the huge decline in other sectors of the economy that previously earned Australia foreign money, including tourism and education, that the fossil fuel advocates in government would seize the opportunity to advocate more mining.

Federal Resources Minister Keith Pitt, a strong advocate of more fossil fuel mining and more coal-fired domestic power generation, told a "virtual roundtable" gathering of mining executives two weeks ago their industry would be "key to Australia's economic recovery once the global Covid-19 pandemic has passed".

Tim Buckley, director of energy finance studies at the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis, says, "Australia spent \$US80 billion in Gladstone building six LNG trains. They were all modelled on an LNG price more than three times what it now is."

They risk becoming stranded assets, he says.

As noted already, Taylor put the financial screws on Victoria to open up more gas supply. He did the same via the MOU with the NSW government.

Under the terms of the document, NSW undertook to ensure that the state was "the easiest jurisdiction to develop new electricity infrastructure in the OECD", while the Commonwealth established a "deregulation

Task Force ... to examine and address regulatory barriers to investment”.

This is code for winding back scrutiny of new development proposals – so-called red and green tape.

The fear is we will see the economic impacts of Covid-19 used as an excuse to permanently weaken environmental protections.

Daniel Gocher, director of climate and environment at the Australasian Centre for Corporate Responsibility, points to various statements from industry bodies such as the Minerals Council of Australia and the Business Council of Australia and conservative media commentators making the case that the economic response to coronavirus should include more fossil fuels and less regulation.

We’ve seen the headlines before: “Resources-led recovery”, and we’re seeing it again now.

Bottom line, the coming recession will be marked by a conflict between those who would protect the environment and those who advocate letting development rip.

The pro-development, pro-fossil-fuel side will be relying on a quirk of human psychology: that we react more strongly to an imminent threat than to a distant one. The fear of coronavirus will distract from the even greater but far more slow-moving threat of climate change and environmental pollution.

Not to downplay the current crisis, but it is worth remembering that Covid-19 has killed but a tiny fraction of the number of people who die each year from environmental causes. Some seven million die each year, globally, according to the World Health Organization, as a result of air pollution.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has estimated that about 3000 deaths are attributable to urban air pollution in Australia each year.



Greens leader Adam Bandt has hopes for a Green New Deal. Photo: Mick Tsikas/AAP

<https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/news-politics/2020/04/11/the-greens-new-deal/15865272009676>

The Greens’ New Deal

Paddy Manning, Saturday Paper, 11/04/2020

Greens leader Adam Bandt says this is the moment for Australia to be ambitious in its thinking about the recovery.

He believes that his policy for a Green New Deal, which has been at the top of his agenda since he took over the party leadership in February, remains the most important policy initiative for the Greens in this term of parliament.

“I see a debate looming about the pathway out; it will be a choice between blue austerity or green growth,” he says. “The Green New Deal is about borrowing to invest to make more money and grow out of the crisis, versus others who argue the only way is cutting, [which] will only increase the crisis.”

He is confident that a sweeping “government-led plan of investment and action to create a clean economy and a caring society” is still possible – perhaps even more viable in the wake of

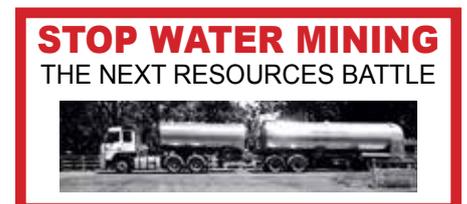
Covid-19. “A three-decade-old neoliberal rule book has been thrown out the window,” he says.

The Greens leader does not describe the Green New Deal as socialist, or even left-populist, but simply as the “right idea for the time”.

Richard Denniss, of The Australia Institute, thinks talking about a Green New Deal is like a game of fantasy football.

“Of course, Australia needs a Green New Deal, but the reason I haven’t talked about it very much is because, under this government, we’re not going to have one,” he says. “The conservatives are still running the country, and Covid-19 hasn’t killed climate denial.”

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