

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 3:24 • 23 JUNE 2020

Narrabri gasfield decision imminent Project seen as Trojan Horse for access to top NSW agricultural land

North west NSW farmers have slammed the Planning Department's decision to label the destructive and polluting Santos Narrabri coal seam gas "approvable".

The Narrabri project has now been referred to the Independent Planning Commission (IPC) which will hold hearings on July 20-24 and must make a final decision within three months.

North West Protection Advocacy urges people to participate, saying: "This crucial action could help stop the spread of gasfields across NSW. You have a choice of speaking via an online portal or in person at the Crossing Theatre in Narrabri.

"If you can make it, we look forward to welcoming you in Narrabri during the week July 20-24."

Chief scientist ignored

The referral to the IPC was made despite the government's failure to implement the Chief Scientist's recommendations for managing risks from the industry and shock revelations last week that landholders affected by the gas industry may not be insured for public liability.

The decision is particularly galling because the amount of contaminated salt waste to be dumped at a location that is still unknown as a result of the project appears to have roughly doubled to 840,000 tonnes.

The department's documents released as part of the recommendation also show about 1,000 hectares of koala habitat may be destroyed for the project.

As well, questions remain over potential contamination of underground water via unknown geological faults, with water experts unable to come to a conclusion concerning the risk.

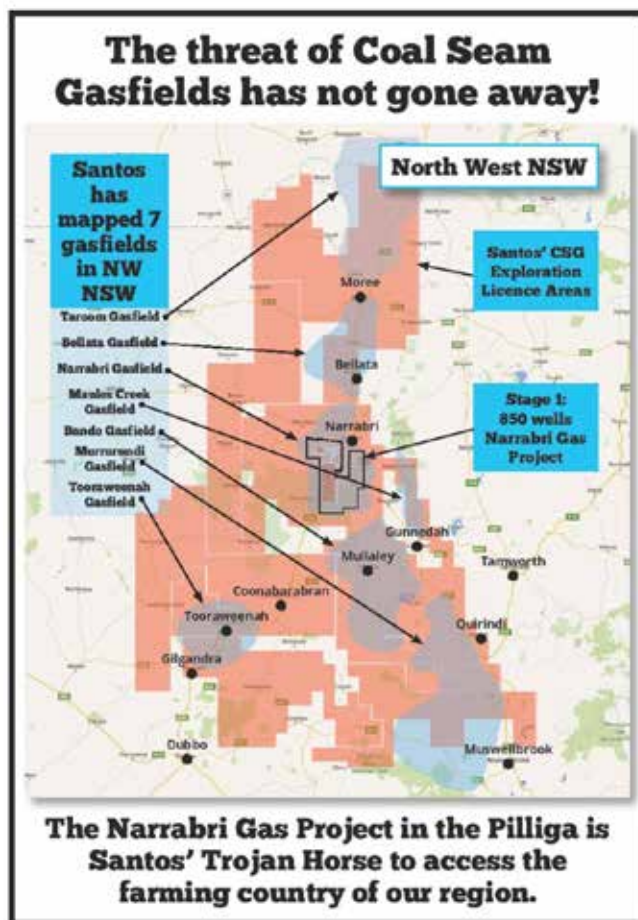
Narrabri farmer Stuart Murray said, "This toxic project should never have reached the Independent Planning Commission simply because the NSW Chief Scientist Mary O'Kane made 16 recommendations to mitigate the risk of CSG, the government took it on board, made it policy, but has still not implemented it after almost six years.

Government betrays community

"Our government has betrayed us.

"We don't know where that contaminated salt waste is going to go, there is no solution. I am deeply concerned it could end up in our river systems and in our underground water systems."

North west NSW stock and station agent and beef producer David Chadwick said, "The Liberal National Coalition has been applying immense pressure to have this project up and running against fierce opposition from the local area and broader region.



"The recent defeat of the CSG Moratorium Bill absolutely highlights how the Liberal National Coalition has betrayed rural Australia. That is why the seat of Barwon was lost after 60 years to Roy Butler of the Shooters, Fishers, and Farmers Party who went to the last election and stood true to his word, unlike the Nationals.

"It is inconceivable after the last three years of record drought and climate

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Critical hearings for Narrabri gasfield

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change being at the forefront of everyone's minds that our government would even contemplate supporting, let alone approving, a project that puts our only secure water supply at risk.

"Santos' history of fines and breaches at the exploration phase guarantees this will end in disaster."

Lock the Gate NSW spokesperson Georgina Woods said "This entire process has been highly politicised and the people of New South Wales will bear the cost.

"Political slogans about gas prices are contradicted by the department's own Assessment Report which admits that if gas prices fall by 30%, the project's economic profile would be a net negative."

CSG uninsurable, farmers exposed

"It is the people of north west NSW that will be hurt most by this. A NSW parliamentary inquiry earlier this year described coal seam gas as "uninsurable" and it has been revealed this week that the largest insurance company in Australia is refusing to offer public liability cover to farmers who have CSG infrastructure on their properties in Queensland.

"We're appealing to the IPC to ignore the political pressure and demonstrate its independence by refusing approval for this polluting project and safeguarding the people, water, and future of the state's north west."

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Say no to coal and yes to nature – you can help!

Help us say 'No!' to Coal and 'Yes!' to Nature. Bimblebox Nature Refuge is too precious to be destroyed for the Galilee Coal Project planned by Clive Palmer's Waratah Coal.

Tell 'em they're dreamin'? Visit the Bimblebox Alliance Chuffed campaign!

<https://www.chuffed.org/project/saving-bimblebox-nature-before-coal>



For 20 years Paola Cassoni and family and supporters have protected and nurtured the native plants and animals of the almost 8000ha Bimblebox Nature Refuge, a rare uncleared gem in Central Qld. They signed legal contracts with state and federal governments to protect the property in 'perpetuity'.

They kept their word. The governments didn't.

For Bimblebox sits over the thermal coal of the southern Galilee Basin. Now Clive Palmer's Waratah Coal has applied for two of the final approvals required from the Queensland Government before mining can commence on

their Galilee Coal Project.

The thermal coal mines proposed for the as-yet-untapped Galilee Basin would be among the world's biggest – a world that cannot cope with more warming and climate chaos. The adverse impacts of this mine and its approved 40mtpa of coal are both local and global.

The Bimblebox Alliance Inc will fight these approvals in the Queensland Land Court, alongside co-objectors, Youth Verdict; the Environmental Defenders Office will provide legal services. We have had our first day in Court, with the Directions Hearing on June 19.

Now the Bimblebox Alliance is asking for your help, because we know you value Nature and care about our unique wildlife and its diminishing habitats – and about our world, in an escalating climate crisis.

Your donation can make all the difference in this David and Goliath fight.

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CSG uninsurable in Qld, landowners bear risk

Queensland's Palaszczuk Government must urgently overhaul how gas companies access private land following revelations Australia's largest insurer will no longer cover farmers for public liability if they have coal seam gas (CSG) infrastructure on their property.

Public liability and farm business insurance policies from Insurance Australia Group (IAG), which includes subsidiaries WFI and CGU, do not cover land and water contamination or the risk of farmers losing their industry accreditation in the event of a spill, or gas infrastructure failure.

Chinchilla broadacre farmer Brian Bender said it was another example of the Palaszczuk Government failing to properly regulate the industry.

"The government approved the coal seam gas industry but didn't worry about the consequences of its decisions, the politicians were only thinking about themselves and the royalties," he said.

"The government didn't worry about the landholder, and now the landholders who can't get insurance will be going after the State Government for compensation and at the end of the day we'll all be paying for it.

"I don't have gas on my property but my neighbour does so companies aren't going to fully insure us either. We're downstream, so it's going to affect our property as well. It's pretty serious."

Lock the Gate Alliance Queensland spokesperson Rick Humphries said public liability was just the tip of the insurance iceberg for farmers who had CSG and mining operations on their properties.

"Due to the failure of successive governments to take this matter seriously, the gas industry has been able to transfer most, if not all, of the liability and risk onto landholders," he said.

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NSW Planning: Same old tricks, same old Wizards

By David C Paull

I reported on bureaucratic mischief in the NSW Department of Planning in 2016 and how decision making around major project approvals is not transparent. But the NSW government's recent decision to approve additional longwall coalmining directly under a major Sydney water catchment has again highlighted serious institutional failings that have plagued NSW planning for over a decade.

There are now further questions regarding the use of 'experts' and the integrity of decision making in the NSW Planning Department. Not surprisingly, the bureaucrats of 2016 are still making the calls on mining projects in NSW.

Controversy has surrounded mining giant Peabody's activities in the Woronora Catchment Special Area, the catchment for Sydney's drinking water, since the initial approval was made in 2009. The NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE) finally approving the longwall extensions in March 2020, scientific evidence over the last ten years has pointed to considerable gaps in our understanding of groundwater processes and impacts on water quality and groundwater dependent ecosystems in areas affected by long wall mining in the Sydney Catchment.

Potential disastrous consequences

These scientific shortcomings were first made apparent in evidence provided to the Southern Coalfield Inquiry in 2008 and have been highlighted again in more recent submissions to Peabody's latest proposal. In particular, submissions by WaterNSW and an open letter signed by over 20 Australian experts in groundwater and hydrology have questioned the 'science' that has been applied to justify the mining taking place and the potentially disastrous consequences for Sydney's water supply. Both have called for mining in our water catchments to be suspended "until the cumulative impacts and consequences of mining to date can be reliably assessed and quantified".

The approval of the new longwalls under the Woronora Reservoir was signed off by Mike Young from DPIE and was accompanied by a letter from



Woronora reservoir, which supplies southern Sydney and northern Illawarra with drinking water. Photo: Glenn Duffus/Water NSW

two independent experts, Emeritus Prof. Jim Galvin and Prof. Neil MacIntyre. In the letter they cite data to support the go-ahead of the mine, provided by the 'Woronora Reservoir Impact Strategy Panel' who also submitted a Stage 2 Report separately to the NSW Government. This document was therefore key in the Government's decision-making processes: the problem is it was commissioned by Peabody, the proponent.

Initially the composition of the experts involved was not made public, but following calls for public disclosure from the community earlier this year, the DPIE subsequently released details, identifying the two signatories to the letter, confirming their position within the Government's own expert panel, the 'Independent Expert Panel for Mining in the Catchment' (IEPMC), set up in 2017 to investigate mining in the 'Greater Sydney Catchment Special Areas'.

Their role, according to the DPIE, was to consider all the evidence in the approval of the mine extension. Particularly as the IEPMC, as stated on their website, "... will also be updated by the expert panellists, who will apply the latest scientific knowledge to mining operations in the catchment".

The two signatories have a long professional association with the mining industry. Prof. MacIntyre is a well-known hydrologist on the impacts of land use and climate change on water yields, particularly in relation to mining. He is a key player at the

University of Queensland's Centre for Coal Seam Gas and the Centre for Mining Innovation. This is an industry funded research body and since 2013, MacIntyre, has received at least eight grants from industry, including from Santos and Adani.

Galvin, who spent most of his time at University of New South Wales (UNSW), has a long international experience in mining engineering and management. He is the chair of the IEPMC and has had a strong connection with The Australian Coal Industry's Research Program, where his research is largely confined to mine engineering. This initiative is 100% owned and funded by all Australian black coal producers through a five cents per tonne levy paid on saleable coal.

The authors of the Peabody Stage 2 Report were Dr Franz Kalf, Emeritus Prof. Tom McMahon, and Prof. Bruce Hebblewhite, with various expertise in engineering, groundwater or hydrology.

All have a long history of consulting with mining companies, including reviewing mining documents, which in NSW are paid for by the proponents. Together, they have been involved with several contentious decisions in relation to groundwater, such as Calga Quarry, Wilpingjong Mine, Shenhua's Watermark Mine on the Liverpool Plains and various southern fields such as the Bulli Coal Seam and the Dendrobium Mine.

NSW Planning: Same old tricks, same old Wizards

• Continued from p3

Prof. Hebblewhite is another mining engineer, also based out of the UNSW and was also the Chair of the 2008 Southern Coalfields Inquiry. The report from that inquiry by all accounts initially facilitated the original in-principal approval for the current mines under the Reservoir despite conflicting and equivocal evidence presented. This should have been a warning sign for things to come. Because despite admissions by Hebblewhite and the rest of the Peabody Panel of insufficient baseline information, the 2019 Stage 2 report states that this is no reason for caution, *"The SCI Report found no evidence that undermining of swamps had affected water supplies."*

Of course, due to a lack of appropriate baseline data, an issue which has plagued decision making for over ten years now, it is equally accurate to say that there is no evidence that undermining of swamps had not affected water supplies. Some have suggested this a clear failure of a scientific-based approach and application of the 'precautionary principle'. Other scientists, such of Prof. Pells, suggest it is not a question of 'if' impacts will occur but a question of 'how long will they take to occur?'

More govt links with Peabody

There are other links between the members of the Government's IEPMC and the Peabody Panel, particularly, a long-standing professional relationship between Professors Hebblewhite and Galvin, publishing several papers together in the area of mine engineering. Hebblewhite also sits on the Government's IEPMC with Galvin and MacIntyre, but whose signature was conspicuously absent on the letter supplied to DPIE to support the mine expansion, perhaps in an effort to avoid blatant conflict of interest?

However, the conflict of interest is for all to see. The letter by MacIntyre and Galvin, representing the IEPMC fails the public interest test because it (a) fails to obtain signatures of other IEPMC members who have hydrological expertise and who may had a different opinion, and (b) uses the findings of the Peabody Stage 2 report to justify their own conclusions.

The overall attitude of Peabody's Stage 2 Report to environmental damage

is one of inevitability and suggests payment, or 'offsets' would be the only option for irreversible damage, damage which the Report also admits cannot be readily prevented or calculated:

"There is very limited, if any, scope for remediating fracture networks beneath swamps ... where it is difficult, if not impossible, to design a viable mining layout that avoids impacting swamps ... there is little option other than to consider offsets as compensation for the consequences."

Even the hard-nosed advocates from the NSW Mineral's Council on p.69 of the report suggest it would be difficult to find an 'offset' that would comply with the current policy.

Planning Wizards favour companies

It seems the Wizards at Planning have not only compromised the government appointed body (IEPMC) to assess mining impacts, they have re-invented the meaning of the word 'independent' to include advice from those seeking favour. But in truth, it has been the tendency of the Major Projects staff for many years to advocate the company arguments and to dismiss the advice of other agencies.

Instead, there has been a concerted effort by the NSW Government and local State MPs to insist that the mining is being 'independently' assessed and monitored, without disclosing the relationship between the Panel and Peabody. Statements made in the NSW Parliament refused to even mention Peabody by name and refused to acknowledge scientific concerns, drawing on the 'all is good' conclusions from the Peabody Stage 2 report. A question from the Greens MP was not allowed.

While there are many questions which require answers, perhaps the most urgent question which needs to be considered, given the lack of certainty is, **why is underground longwall mining allowed within Catchment Special Areas at all?** The demonstrated damage that has occurred due to mining activities in the special areas in fact undermines the statutory ability of WaterNSW to ensure these areas are protected and enhanced for the public good. Sydney is the only major city where mining is allowed in drinking water catchments.

It seems in New South Wales, multi-nationals like Peabody, whose environmental record is never questioned and for the last five years have paid no tax out of an income of \$16.5 million manage to get their way every time. While Peabody nearly went bankrupt a few years ago, selling assets in the Hunter Valley, their record of gaining approvals remains unblemished.

Entrenched conflicts & secrecy

With the NSW ICAC turning into a toothless tiger, we now have a system it seems where conflicts of interest and secrecy are now well and truly entrenched. A system where bureaucrats and politicians betray the public trust. Where both sides of politics are implicated. Perhaps a Royal Commission may be the only way to cut the umbilical chord connecting government and industry, until then, all the public have is an assurance that not knowing enough about such a critical issue is no reason to act to prevent further irreparable damage to Sydney's drinking water supply and quality.

• David Paull is an ecologist who quit the NSW Environment Office over his disgust at the rubber stamping of resource projects in NSW.

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Boiling Cold brings you independent news and insight into energy, industry and climate in Western Australia.

Boiling Cold is written by Peter Milne, who covered energy for *The West Australian* and has since written for *The Saturday Paper* and numerous industry publications. Prior to journalism he had a 20-plus years oil and gas career in engineering, economic analysis and commercial negotiation roles.

Milne says *Boiling Cold* is news for employees, suppliers, customers, communities and the curious; those who want to see worthwhile jobs for themselves and their children, the environment protected, taxes paid and governments working for their citizens.

• See:

<https://www.boilingcold.com.au/>

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Thumper trucks threaten WA heritage

Planned seismic surveys that will search for gas north of Perth threaten Aboriginal Heritage sites, important ecological communities, and tourism.

Following a successful campaign that led to Western Australia's Environmental Protection Authority agreeing to hold a public review in response to Beach Energy's plan to conduct a seismic survey in the Mid West, Lock the Gate WA is now calling on the EPA to do the same for Mineral Resources' "Raven" proposal.

The company wants to clear about 40 hectares of native vegetation and use thumper trucks to survey across 122.6 km², which is near communities that have declared 'gasfield free' like Bibby Springs, Cervantes, Dandaragan, Hill River, and Jurien Bay.

The surveys will mean tracks are cleared through sensitive wetlands and a nature reserve, and could disturb the nearby and renowned Pinnacles (Nambung National Park).

Yued Elder Bev Port-Louis said she was worried several sacred birthing sites in the seismic testing area could be impacted.

"Enough is enough of destroying Aboriginal sites. If we don't voice our opinions the government and mining companies will just keep destroying the things we want to protect," she said.

"As an Elder and a grandmother and a great-grandmother it just rips your guts out when nobody wants to listen and the government doesn't want to protect these places because their only interest is mining companies.

"You go out on that Brand Highway and as a woman, you could just burst into tears looking at what has been ripped out of that land. Our nannas gave birth to their children there and we feel very strongly about birthing sites."

The surveys could lead eventually to fracking or gas extraction, which would have a devastating impact on the flora and fauna.



Fossil Fool Bulletin

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In the news this week

This week Fossil Fool Bulletin has summarised 13,240 words of news for your convenience. [Click on the links to view original articles.](#) (Subscriptions may be required)

THE ADANI SAGA

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/jun/12/adani-mine-three-major-insurers-to-have-no-further-involvement-in-coal-project>

Adani mine: three major insurers to have no further involvement in coal project

Graham Readfern, *Guardian*, 12/06/2020

Three major insurance groups that provided cover for parts of the Adani coal project in Queensland have said they will not provide future policies to the project.

AXA XL, Liberty Mutual and HDI have told *Guardian Australia* they will not have any further involvement in the project after previously providing insurance cover that has now expired.

The names of the three companies, together with one other insurer, appear on a file seen by *Guardian Australia* as having provided insurance cover for the project.

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/jun/19/adani-mine-fourth-major-insurer-declines-to-renew-policies-with-coal-project>

Adani mine: fourth major insurer declines to renew policies with coal project

Graham Readfern, *Guardian*, 19/06/2020

Another major insurer that was providing cover for the Adani Carmichael coalmine project in Queensland has said it will not be renewing policies with the coal project.

Aspen Insurance is the fourth of Adani's underwriters to walk away from the major mine and export rail project currently being constructed in the Galilee basin.

Last week, three former insurers – AXA XL, Liberty Mutual and HDI – all confirmed they would not continue previous insurance policies on the project.

In a statement, Aspen Insurance said: "Aspen can confirm that it will not be renewing any insurance policies associated with the Adani Carmichael mine.

"As a business, Aspen understands the importance of environmental, social, and governance issues and we review our underwriting approach on an ongoing basis as part of this."



GetUp tells it like it is. Graphic: GetUp, Facebook

COAL ROCKS ON

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/jun/12/glencores-15bn-coalmine-a-step-closer-after-queensland-grants-special-status>

Glencore's \$1.5bn coalmine a step closer after Queensland grants special status

Graham Readfern, *Guardian*, 12/06/2020

The Switzerland-based mining company Glencore will push ahead with a proposed \$1.5bn open-cut coalmine after the Queensland government announced it had granted the project special status on Friday.

The Queensland government's decision will bring environmental and other assessments for the mine, which would dig up 20m tonnes of the fossil fuel annually for 35 years, under the office of the state's coordinator general.

According to an April report from Glencore sent to the Queensland government, "potentially relevant" to the

project were four threatened ecological communities, 26 listed threatened species, 12 listed migratory birds and one nationally significant wetland.

Glencore said the Valeria project would cover 28,000 hectares, with a "disturbance area" of 10,000 hectares. The capital cost of the mine was estimated to be between \$1bn and \$1.5bn.

<https://www.smb.com.au/politics/federal/shenhua-coal-mine-questioned-over-disturbing-water-report-omissions-20200616-p5532i.html>

Shenhua coal mine questioned over 'disturbing' water report omissions

Mike Foley, *SMH*, 16/06/2020

Damage to underground water resources from the controversial Shenhua Watermark coal mine may be far worse than forecasts endorsed by the NSW government, according to Emeritus Professor Ian Acworth who has uncovered new evidence hiding in plain sight.

The Chinese-owned open cut mega mine is slated to dig a vast pit into the side of a hill, called Mount Watermark, overlooking Australia's most fertile black soil farming country, the Liverpool Plains near Gunnedah.

Shenhua claims the region's underground water resources, held in shallow aquifers and tapped by farm bores, are not connected to the mine site.

But Professor Ian Acworth has found the ancient Mooki riverbed, buried deep underground, directly links the proposed mine pit to aquifers underneath the fertile black soil plains.

That means if the coal pit is dug and water seeps in, it will come from the same bucket as farmers' bores.

<https://www.theage.com.au/business/banking-and-finance/us-funds-titan-blackrock-deeply-concerned-about-nsw-coal-mine-20200616-p55343.html>

US funds titan BlackRock 'deeply concerned' about NSW coal mine

Charlotte Grieve, Age, 17/06/2020

The world's largest asset manager says it is deeply concerned about the looming destruction of ancient Aboriginal artefacts by a Chinese coal producer it has invested in with controversial plans for a mine in regional NSW.

New York-based asset management titan BlackRock confirmed it holds about 202 million Hong Kong-listed shares in China Shenhua Energy, the world's largest thermal coal producer, worth approximately \$474 million at current prices. About 1 million of these shares are held by BlackRock's Australian arm.

The Chinese company is planning to mine a site near Gunnedah in northern NSW against the wishes of its traditional owners, the Gomeroi people. The open-cut coal mine site contains ancient grinding grooves that show where First Nations warriors sharpened spears as well as burial sites and sacred trees.

Farmer John said the mine would permanently damage and restrict the groundwater used to service the valuable black agricultural soils of the Liverpool plains and drive up water prices for local farmers. "It's a 30 year mine but the impact is forever."

China Shenhua proposed lifting sandstone slabs to relocate some of the Indigenous artefacts but Tim Owen, principal of archaeological consultancy firm GML Heritage, said the company's own report found the rock was too fragile and would break, destroying

the artefacts. The proposed relocation site for the grooves was also on the grounds of where an Indigenous massacre occurred around 1830, he said.

<https://www.smh.com.au/environment/climate-change/hazelwood-pit-lake-proposal-lacks-environmental-tick-residents-20200621-p554p7.html>

Hazelwood 'pit lake' proposal lacks environmental tick: residents

Miki Perkins, SMH, 21/06/2020

Gippsland residents have urged the state's planning minister to order an environmental assessment of a proposal to turn the vast Hazelwood mine pit into a lake, which would take up to 25 years to fill and require almost twice the amount of water Melbourne consumes in a year.

The rehabilitation of Hazelwood's mine pit will be the largest ever undertaken in Australia, after the heavily polluting power plant was closed in 2017.

But a coalition of Gippsland residents called Friends of Latrobe Water is worried the enormous amount of water needed to fill the pit – around 725 gegalitres – would reduce flows to the local Latrobe River system and harm the environment. The river system also flows into the Ramsar-listed Gippsland Lakes wetlands.

MINING MAYHEM

<https://www.afr.com/rear-window/secret-recording-rio-tinto-not-sorry-for-cave-blast-20200614-p552eh>

Secret recording: Rio Tinto 'not sorry' for cave blast

Joe Aston, AFR, 15/06/2020

Going by the global headlines, you'd think Rio Tinto had expressed deep remorse for destroying a 46,000-year-old Aboriginal heritage site over the protests of its traditional owners. But you would be wrong.

One of Rio Tinto's most senior executives told employees on Thursday that the company is not sorry for blowing up the Juukan Gorge caves, only for the distress caused by doing so.

In an internal "town hall" meeting held on Wednesday evening (a recording of which we've obtained), Rio's iron ore boss Chris Salisbury faced a staff member's complaint that "people have seen how we've positioned our response with an apology for the distress caused, not for doing the wrong thing".

Answering, Salisbury gave a lengthy explanation of the events leading to the detonation of the sacred Aborig-

inal site last month and clarified that "that's why we haven't apologised for the event itself, per se, but apologised for the distress the event caused".

Salisbury also referred to the destruction of the caves as "quite galling to me as well, because we are recognised ... as one of the leading resources companies in this field".

He also assured staff that Rio retains the muted backing of "political leaders of both sides".

"I've engaged with lots and lots of stakeholders and ... quietly, there is still support for us out there."

The confrontational tone of questions posed to Salisbury and community relations boss Simone Niven – and the fact a recording of the internal briefing has been leaked to *The Australian Financial Review* – suggest that Rio employees are appalled by the company's unapologetic stance on the Juukan Gorge incident.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-06-13/letter-traditional-owners-40-sites-that-bhp-planned-to-destroy/12348396>

Dozens more ancient heritage sites could be destroyed by Australian mining companies

Cathy Van Extel & Gregg Borschmann, ABC, 13/06/2020

Dozens of sacred sites in the Pilbara and Goldfields regions of Western Australia are under threat from approvals granted by the State Government since the destruction of the 46,000-year-old Juukan Caves last month by Rio Tinto.

Key points: A letter from Banjima native title holders in the WA Pilbara said they were "angry and hurt" about possible destruction of 40 sacred sites by BHP • The sites include ochre pits, ceremonial grounds and rock shelters with evidence of human occupation going back at least 10,000 to 15,000 years • Ngalia traditional owners oppose the destruction of another seven sites in WA Goldfields region by Australian Potash.

<https://www.smh.com.au/business/banking-and-finance/mine-approval-laws-allow-systematic-erasure-of-indigenous-culture-20200617-p553ee.html>

Mine approval laws allow 'systematic erasure' of Indigenous culture

Charlotte Grieve, SMH, 18/06/2020

Environmental lawyers say frameworks designed to preserve Aboriginal artefacts from destruction in mining developments are inadequate, amid renewed attempts by NSW lawmakers

to thwart the China Shenhua Energy coal mine in Gunnedah.

Research by pro-bono law firm Environmental Defenders Office found only one of the 704 applications for permits in NSW that enabled companies to construct on land that was culturally significant to traditional owners was rejected between 2012 and 2017. "This says that if you want to destroy cultural heritage in this country, you're almost certainly going to be allowed to," EDO chief executive David Morris said.

NSW shadow minister for Aboriginal affairs David Harris has been working to create a new bill to raise the bar for companies seeking mine approval by mandating thorough consultation with local Indigenous groups.

NSW Greens MP Cate Faehrmann called a motion in Parliament on Wednesday evening to reject China Shenhua's application for a mining licence, set to be renewed at the end of this month, and to protect the Gomerio people's sacred sites and artefacts.

OIL & GAS LEAKS

<https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/narrabri-gas-project-moves-forward-in-the-process/news-story/84c7da933874bb38734aed3997cd8b8c>

Final assessment: Narrabri gas project gets government's backing

Anna Caldwell, Daily Telegraph, 12/06/2020

The NSW government has recommended a historic multibillion-dollar coal seam gas project at Narrabri to secure the state's energy future.

The Daily Telegraph can reveal the state's Department of Planning has recommended the Santos Narrabri gas project, after a protracted three year consideration.

It's understood drilling of appraisal wells would begin almost immediately, as well as quick employment and gas supply, although a supply pipe into the broader market will still be required.

• *The Daily Terrorist talks up Narrabri*

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/jun/12/santos-narrabri-gas-project-formally-backed-by-nsw-government>

Santos \$3.6bn Narrabri gas project formally backed by NSW government

Adam Morton, Guardian, 12/06/2020

A contentious gas development at Narrabri, in north-west New South Wales, is a step closer to going ahead after being formally backed by the Berejiklian government.

The state Department of Planning, Industry and Environment on Friday said it had referred the \$3.6bn project, proposed by the oil and gas giant Santos, to the state's Independent Planning Commission and recommended it be approved with what it described as strict conditions.

If approved, it could involve up to 850 coal seam gas wells being drilled on 1,000 hectares of a 95,000 hectare site taking in the Pilliga forest and nearby grazing land.

The decision was welcomed by federal energy and emissions reduction minister, Angus Taylor, and the state's business lobby, but condemned by local farmers and conservation groups, who feared it would be toxic to the local environment.

The department said about 98% of nearly 23,000 submissions it received on the proposal opposed the project.

The planning minister, Rob Stokes, said the independent commission would hold online public hearings before a final decision was made "to provide certainty for the community and industry". A decision is expected within 12 weeks unless the commission applies for an extension.

It said the department's report suggested the project may involve the destruction of about 1,000 hectares of koala habitat, that the expected contaminated salt waste that would be produced had nearly doubled and that questions about the impact on underground water remained unanswered.

Narrabri farmer Stuart Murray said the government had not implemented 14 of 16 recommendations to limit the risk of coal seam gas made nearly six years ago by the then NSW chief scientist, now Independent Planning Commission chair, Mary O'Kane. "Our government has betrayed us," Murray said.

<https://www.theage.com.au/business/companies/gas-import-terminal-solar-farm-floated-for-geelong-oil-refinery-site-20200615-p552vr.html>

Gas import terminal, solar farm floated for Geelong oil refinery site

Nick Toscano, The Age, 16/06/2020

The site of the troubled Geelong oil refinery is earmarked for a major transformation including the construction of a new shipping terminal to import natural gas into Victoria and a solar farm.

As the 65-year-old refinery heads towards a loss of as much as \$42.5

million in the first half of the year, down from an \$18 million profit, Viva Energy is set to detail an ambitious proposal to investors on Tuesday to turn the refinery site into an "energy hub" while retaining existing refining operations.

The LNG import terminal being planned for the site – to import gas from elsewhere in Australia and overseas – would be the second such project proposed for Victoria, as AGL fights to gain environmental approval for a controversial floating gas-import facility in Western Port Bay.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-06-16/world-heritage-sites-skirt-areas-nominated-for-exploration/12359418>

WA's World Heritage listed Ningaloo Reef on oil, gas exploration map

Karen Michelmore & Laura Birch, ABC, 18/06/2020

An early proposal that could lead to waters off Western Australia's pristine World Heritage listed areas being opened up to oil and gas exploration has left fishers and tourism operators shocked.

Key points: • Environmental groups say they are "gobsmacked" by a proposal to potentially open up some of WA's most pristine areas to oil and gas exploration • A map of areas nominated by industry for potential exploration has been released • The public consultation period is open until June 29.

The Ningaloo Reef and Shark Bay are close to Commonwealth waters identified in a Federal Government map of areas nominated by industry for potential exploration.

HYDROGEN HYPE

<https://www.echo.net.au/2020/06/planet-watch-is-hydrogen-the-fuel-of-the-future/>

Planet Watch: Is hydrogen the fuel of the future?

David Lowe, Echonet Daily, 16/06/2020

There's been a lot of hot air in the media recently about hydrogen. The federal government wants the gas as part of their energy road map, and the green side of politics is enthusiastic too, with certain caveats. The problem is that there's hydrogen and then there's hydrogen. As an energy source, things quickly get complicated where the simplest chemical element in the universe is concerned.

• *Good explanation of the potential benefits and risks of hydrogen fuel follows.*

CLIMATE CRISIS

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/grogonomics/2020/jun/16/australians-arent-worried-about-climate-change-the-message-just-isnt-getting-through>

Australia has a problem with climate change denial. The message just isn't getting through

Greg Jericho, *Guardian*, 16/06/2020

An international survey of people's news habits around the world reveals that Australians' opinions on climate change are determined mostly by age and news source but that, overall we are more likely to deny climate change, than most other nations. And it is clear from the results of the 2020 Digital Media Report that a major reason for this denial is the influence of News Corp.

The report has some pretty eye-opening results on the topic of climate change, which confirm longheld beliefs about the impact of the News Corp coverage of the issue.

Nearly 30% of skynews.com.au readers don't believe climate change is a serious issue (compared to 35% of those who watch Sky News TV), and we see News Corp websites dominate the news sites whose readers most deny climate change.

Those who call themselves rightwing are much more likely to deny climate change:

But while this may not be surprising, given their news sources and the statements by rightwing politicians, what is more worrying is that just as many of those who class themselves as "centre" view climate change as merely "some-what serious", as do rightwingers.

This suggests a large gulf in the ability of the media to convey the issue's importance to those with little political affiliation.

We need to reach those vaguely aware of the issue but not really informed well enough to understand its seriousness. Failure to do so will cede the

issue to the climate-change denying media outlets, and will continue to have Australia with one of the highest numbers of deniers in the world.

FOSSIL POLITICS

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/jun/13/gas-completely-dominated-discussion-about-covid-19-recovery-commission-adviser-says>

Gas 'completely dominated' discussion about Covid-19 recovery, commission adviser says

Adam Morton, *Guardian*, 13/06/2020

A member of a government Covid-19 recovery taskforce has rejected the overwhelming focus on gas as the path out of recession, saying the country risked ending up with stranded fossil fuel infrastructure and should be doing more to back renewable energy.

Paul Bastian, national secretary of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and a member of a manufacturing taskforce advising the federal government's handpicked National Covid-19 Coordination Commission (NCCC), said gas had a significant role to play, but the importance of cheap clean energy in cutting costs for industry had barely featured in public discussion when it should be "front and centre".

Bastian declined to comment directly on a leaked draft report by the manufacturing taskforce.

But he confirmed gas had "completely dominated" taskforce discussions, while renewable energy played a much smaller role.

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/jun/22/minerals-council-of-australia-endorses-net-zero-emissions-but-with-no-target-date>

Minerals Council of Australia endorses net-zero emissions but with no target date

Graham Readfern, *Guardian*, 22/06/2020

Australia's peak mining body representing the coal industry has released a plan to tackle climate change across the industry, endorsing a goal of reaching net-zero emissions "as fast as possible" but without setting a target date.

The Minerals Council of Australia's chief executive, Tania Constable, claimed it was "possible and plausible for the coal industry to achieve near zero or net-zero emissions" by using carbon offsets and carbon capture and storage technologies.

MCA's plan has been greeted with a mixture of cynicism, scorn and qualified acceptance from climate action groups, with some branding it "green-washing".

The Australasian Centre for Corporate Responsibility (ACCR), a pro-climate action group, said the MCA plan lacked tangible commitments on key issues including phasing out coal and reaching net-zero emissions.

Dan Gocher, the group's director of climate and the environment, said: "This is embarrassing and woefully inadequate: the MCA can't even commit to net-zero emissions by any date. What type of plan is this without any dates or targets?"

"This 'plan' is the equivalent of a dead cat on the table - and a clear distraction from the mining industry's cultural heritage woes."



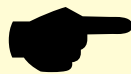
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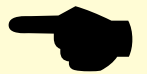


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Fossil Fool Bulletin is published Tuesdays (in your email Wednesday).



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