



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

FFB 3:23 • 12 JUNE 2020

Golden opportunity for fossil fools: PM's fossil-fuelled NCCC wants Covid economic recovery dominated by hand-outs to gas gougers



NCCC chairman Neville Power, an executive of Strike Energy who stands to gain from the gas-lead recovery the NCCC has been pushing for.

By Eve Sinton

PM Scott Morrison's Nation Covid-19 Coordination Commission (NCCC), headed up by a gas industry executive and stacked with fossil fuel-linked individuals, is pushing for massive government subsidies to the gas industry.

The NCCC believes that the capital-intensive industry which generates minimal employment but massive pollution, will save Australia's economy after the devastation from Covid-19.

A leaked report outlining the NCCC's plan has horrified onlookers. On a long list of desires, the report wants a

gas pipeline linking the western and eastern gas markets, and an accelerated approval of Santos' Narrabri gasfield with an associated fertiliser plant. Relaxed regulations and slashing workers' rights and conditions also feature on the list.

Long-time *Western Australian* business journalist Peter Milne said, "Building a gas pipeline from WA to the east to help the the economy recover from Covid-19 is such an extraordinarily bad idea the judgement of Nev Power and others pushing it has to be questioned."

Milne, a former *West Australian* employee, now runs his own website – Boiling Cold – with a focus on the WA gas industry.

His opinion is shared at *Renew Economy*, which is horrified by "The breadth, depth and cynicism of the so-called Covid-Commission, which appears entirely possessed with the narrow interests of the gas industry, from where many of these commissioners have emerged.

Locking in white elephants

"A leaked master plan from the manufacturing taskforce of the NCCC ... has as its centrepiece a mad proposal to resuscitate a widely discredited multi-billion dollar plan to build an east-west gas pipeline, locking in a white elephant at taxpayers expense for decades to come."

Besides the Prime Minister, who is amongst a group of 22 current Coa-

lition MPs and Senators who form part of the network built around the Institute of Public Affairs and its satellites, *Renew Economy* highlights energy minister Angus Taylor.

"His fingerprints are all over these initiatives. He has made no secret of his desire to see a 'gas-led recovery' and can barely bring himself to utter the words 'wind,' 'solar' and 'batteries,' let alone give them support.

• Continued p2

Special catch-up edition after illness

Fossil Fool Bulletin's publication schedule was delayed to due the Editor's illness, followed by a disastrous computer crash.

This bumper edition brings our news records up to date – a lot to digest, but FFB is always watching the fossil fools and never lost the plot.

FFB is now having to plan a replacement for an ageing Mac-Book Pro.

Should readers wish to help, a donation can be made to:

Focus Publications

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• P2: Disaster capitalism
in progress

• P3: NSW govt rushes to
defeat gas ban bill

P3: Oakey Coal Action
headed for High Court

Golden opportunity as fossil fools try to cash in on disaster capitalism

• Continued from p1

Taylor: ideology and ambition

“This is partly led by Taylor’s personal ideology, and partly by personal ambition. The one-time ferocious anti-wind campaigner – despite the smell of scandal that hovers around his office – is also relentlessly ambitious. He wants to be PM. And this is just as much about currying favour in the Coalition and media’s right-wing rump as it is about any economic or policy vision,” said *Renew Economy’s* Giles Parkinson.

“In summary, this is disaster capitalism at its worst. Gas, because of the release of methane, is little better than coal when it comes to greenhouse gas emissions. Its role as a ‘transition’ fuel is questionable at best, and terribly short-sighted, and the construction of expensive gas infrastructure destined to be stranded assets is pure madness.”

Qld gasfield battlers issue warning

Landholders living near gasfields on Queensland’s Western Downs have condemned the Federal Government and National Covid-19 Coordination Commission’s ill-sighted push for more unconventional gas, and have warned other communities in regions targeted by the industry.

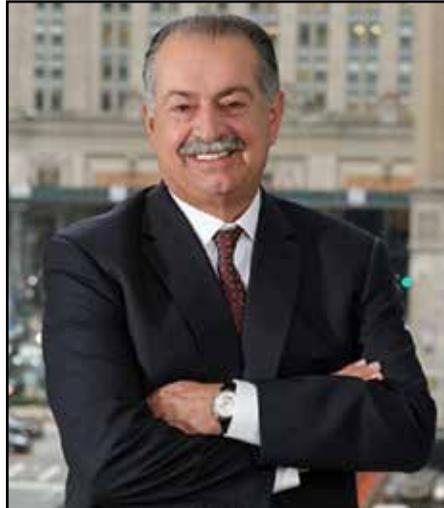
Chinchilla locals say if the Queensland experience is anything to go by, the industry must not be allowed to expand any further.

Chinchilla landholder advocate and consultant, Shay Dougall, whose family, friends and clients’ properties are impacted by unconventional gasfields, said a serious power imbalance remained between the multinational gas companies and Queensland landholders.

Qld govt has lost track of gasfields

She pointed to a recently released Queensland Audit Office report as evidence, which found successive Queensland Government’s had effectively lost track of the industry to the detriment of landholders and communities.

“The initial issues were that landholders were never truly informed about what they were signing up to, and they



NCCC adviser Andrew Liveris, a long-time pusher of gas expansion feeding petro-chemical industries in northern Australia. Liveris is a former Dow Chemical executive. He is • Deputy Chairman of Worley Parsons (global chemicals and engineering company) • Independent non-executive Director of Saudi Aramco (an oil and gas company) • Special Advisor to Saudi Arabia’s sovereign wealth fund, the Public Investment Fund (PIF). • Appointed to Co-Chair the Northern Territory Economic Reconstruction Commission.

were never given appropriate legal representation – they were entering into long term legal contracts and they had very little in terms of dispute resolution,” she said.

“These agreements had no consideration for the industry’s growth and expansion, or recompense for developing issues – it was a one sized fits all approach.

“Landholders were not appropriately represented in either the approvals process, the permit process, or when they were required to go toe to toe with multinational companies and sign multigenerational contracts.

“That was the problem then, and it’s the problem now, as has been identified in every inquiry into the industry in Queensland, and has culminated in the recent Queensland Audit Office report.”

“This is nothing more than an unashamed, overt land grab by the gas industry. Until we see an adequate response to the damning Queensland Audit Office report, all the other states being pulled into this by the Covid Commission should take note and say this must be answered before we move on.”

Toxic waste dumped as landholders carry burden

Chinchilla farmer Glenn Beasley, whose property sits adjacent to a toxic CSG waste dump at the headwaters of the Murray Darling River system, said landholders were being asked to carry the burden of the gas industry.

“At a time when governments are asking primary producers to be increasingly responsible for matters of biosecurity, we find ourselves with a massive 15 million tonne CSG toxic waste facility perched immediately upstream to priority agricultural land,” he said.

“This compromises human health, biosecurity, and the environment, and expert appraisal has said this is a legacy future generations will have to deal with.”

Lock the Gate Queensland spokesperson Ellie Smith said by investing in renewable energy rather than gas, Australia could boost manufacturing without putting precious water resources or communities at risk.

“It’s clear from the experience on the Western Downs that gasfields do much more harm than good, particularly to the communities who are directly impacted,” she said.

“Gas will also contribute to dangerous climate change.”

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350.org has launched a Fossil Fuel Watch website – www.fossilfuelwatch.org – which outlines each member of the NCCC and its associated bodies, and their existing and past links to the fossil fuel industry.

It also contains an interactive list of all of the concessions being sought by the fossil fuel industry during the Covid-19 crisis in the form of financial support, changes to regulation and project-level support.

The website is the first step in a national campaign to bring greater transparency to the Government’s Covid-19 response to ensure Australia emerges as a more just society through the Covid-19 recovery.

NSW govt rushes to defeat gas ban bill

The Berejiklian and Barilaro Government's decision to vote down the CSG Moratorium Bill under extraordinary circumstances shows it has abandoned farmers and rural communities, according to environmentalists.

Independent MP Justin Field's Bill passed the Upper House late on the night of June 3, only for the Berejiklian Government to break with normal process and bring the Bill forward to use its majority in the Lower House to vote it down on June 4.

The Government came under criticism in the parliament for failing to implement the recommendations of the Chief Scientist for managing the risks of coal seam gas, which prompted the passage of the Bill in the Upper House last night to pause the industry while protections and data collection are put in place.

Narrabri renewable energy consultant Rohan Boehm said the government's rejection of the Bill was a kick in the guts for locals who had spent the past decade struggling with the twin threats of the drought and Santos' Narrabri gas project.

"We know that renewable energy, wind, solar, and bioenergy are the perfect fit for north west NSW and Narrabri in particular," he said.

"With major new infrastructure developments coming through we urgently need a whole suite of brand new industries based on low cost and abun-



Independent NSW MLC, Justin Field.

dant energy. That's what renewables will do and at a much cheaper price than what coal seam gas could ever do for the people of the north west and the state.

Narrabri gas of no value to NSW

"The Narrabri Gas project will immediately become an abandoned project because it simply cannot compete in the energy market – the gas is far too expensive, it will never add any value to the region and will add no value to NSW."

Lock the Gate Alliance spokesperson and Mullaley farmer Margaret Fleck

said the Berejiklian Government and in particular its National Party members had betrayed rural people.

"We applaud the efforts of our local member Roy Butler who is listening to and representing the people of Barwon and Justin Field who brought this bill to the parliament. We also thank the Labor Party, Greens and Animal Justice Party for supporting the passage of the bill," she said.

"It is deeply troubling that, at a time when we are still struggling with the impacts of an unprecedented drought, the government would put our scarce water resources at further risk by encouraging the polluting and risky coal seam gas industry.

"Santos' plan to drill 850 coal seam gas wells through farmland and the Pilliga Forest is a serious threat to a Great Artesian Basin water recharge zone.

Chief Scientist ignored

"It is also greatly troubling the Berejiklian Government has gone so far out of its way to bring forward this debate and vote down this Bill when it can't even implement all of the Chief Scientist's recommendations on managing the risky CSG industry.

"The Berejiklian Government has spectacularly failed to deliver its promise and implement these recommendations. With the passing of this Bill, it has now utterly sold out the bush."

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Oakey Coal Action Alliance headed for High Court

Farmers on Queensland's Darling Downs fighting to protect underground water and some of the best agricultural land in the country against a destructive coal mine are taking their battle to the High Court of Australia.

Last week, the Oakey Coal Action Alliance's application to have the matter heard in the High Court was approved.

OCAA secretary Paul King said the decision was strongly welcomed by the farmers who had been involved in the 13-year struggle against the New Acland Stage 3 proposal.

"It gives them renewed hope for their future," he said.

Aileen Harrison, 84, is the president of OCCA and has been pursued by New Acland Coal for hundreds of thousands in court costs awarded in last year's Court of Appeal orders.

Lock the Gate Alliance Queensland spokesperson Ellie Smith said, "Hopefully with the fight now headed to the High Court, New Acland owners New Hope will stop trying to bully the Palaszczuk Government into approving this destructive coal mine expansion.

"So much has been lost already with stages one and two of this truly terrible mine, so we will fight until the very end to stop Stage 3. If the New Acland Stage 3 thermal coal mine is approved, it would destroy more than 1,300

hectares of mapped Strategic Cropping Land and drain 365 water bores.

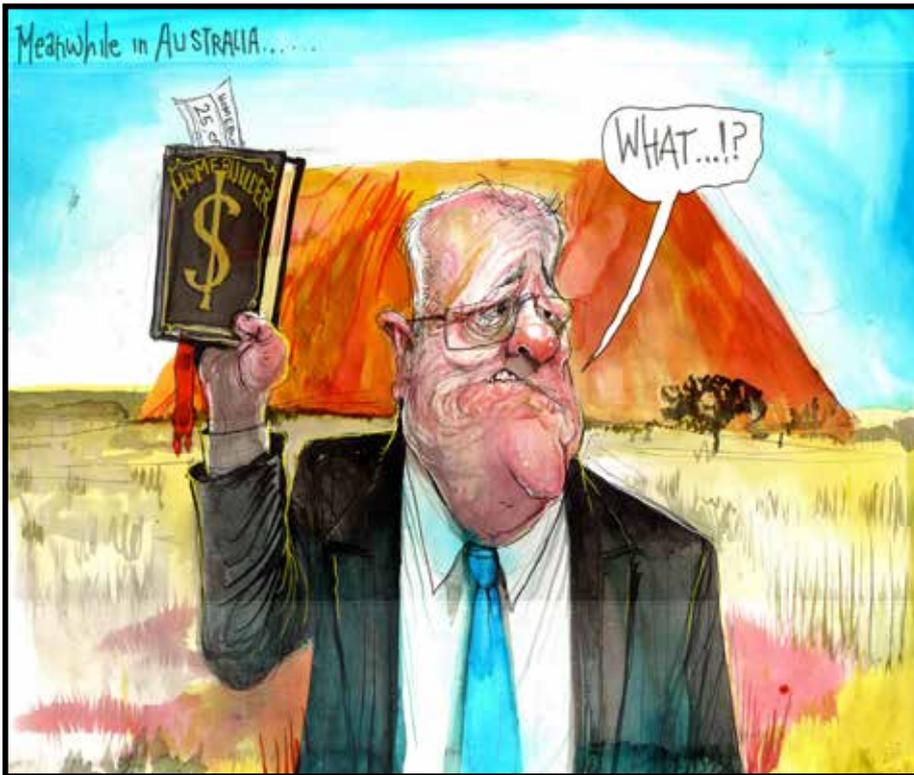
"This mine would kill farming jobs and threaten food production, including 10 million litres of milk, at a time when it is needed more than ever.

"New Hope has been fined for noise violations, drilling illegal bore holes, and is still under investigation for mining outside its designated area.

"The Oakey community has fought this battle with heart and soul for more than a decade now, and we will continue to fight with them until the very last avenue to stop this destructive coal mine is extinguished."

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Inside the news

With a combination of illness and a computer crash, **FFB's** future has been under threat.

However, with this bumper edition, the news records are up to date and the newsletter will continue, with the next edition due June 23.

The fossilfool.com.au website will soon be updated.

There's a lot to digest in the following news summary.

The story on page 16, *Renewed scrutiny over decision not to protect Aboriginal sacred sites in NSW*, ties in with recent developments showing the destructive impact of mining on Aboriginal heritage.

Rio Tinto blew up a significant cave shelter last week, to expand its iron ore operation. BHP has even more destructive plans to expand iron ore mining. **FFB** usually sticks to comment on fossil fuel, but these iron ore miners deserve criticism for their disrespect for our First Nations peoples.

FFB needs a new \$4,000 laptop to keep the pages churning out. If you're able to help, bank account details are in the panel below left – the one with the big blue dollar sign.

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Fossil Fool Bulletin

Published by Eve Sinton
PO Box 555, Mullumbimby,
NSW 2482, Australia

Fossil Fool Bulletin

fossil.fool.bulletin@gmail.com
evesinton@gmail.com

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In the news this fortnight

This fortnight Fossil Fool Bulletin has summarised 42,360 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/business/2020/may/18/anti-adani-coalmine-activists-target-insurance-broker-with-virtual-protest>

Anti-Adani coalmine activists target insurance broker with virtual protest

Ben Smee, *Guardian*, 18/05/2020

Anti-Adani activists will bombard the world's largest insurance broker with calls, emails and social media messages in a virtual protest on Tuesday ahead of its annual general meeting in New York.

The company is understood to be working for Adani to find insurance policies for the Carmichael mine.

While the public health emergency has placed physical activism into hibernation at a critical point for Adani, the climate movement has pivoted its tactics in a way that some hope could more effectively disrupt the project and the global coal sector.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/may/20/marsh-can-no-longer-sit-on-the-fence-it-must-rule-out-brokering-insurance-for-adani>

Marsh can no longer sit on the fence: it must rule out brokering insurance for Adani

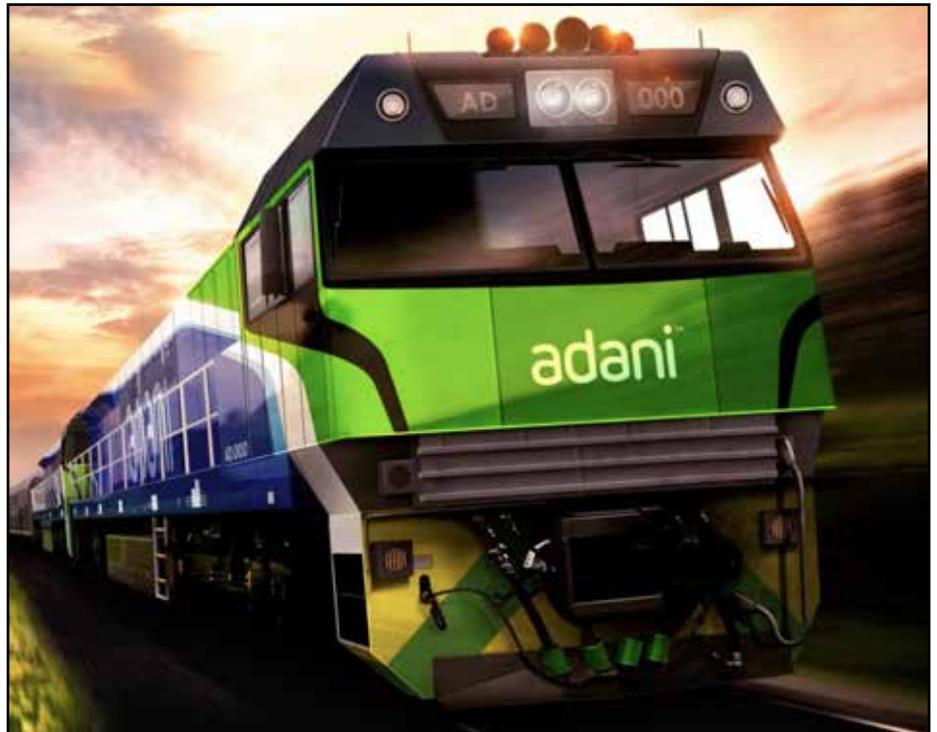
John Hewson, *Guardian*, 20/05/2020

Climate change carries massive business risks, and acting to reduce emissions is in the best interests of insurance companies. Thermal coal is the biggest single contributor to climate change.

Brokers need to lead from the front by refusing to arrange insurance for new coal projects that are fuelling dangerous climate change, such as Adani's controversial Carmichael mine.

Marsh must insure our children's future against catastrophic climate damage, not a billionaire's coalmine that will rob future generations of a safe climate and drive up risks for the entire insurance industry.

• Dr John Hewson is an honorary professor at the Crawford School of Public Policy, Australian National University, and a former leader of the Liberal party



The Coronavirus pandemic hasn't stopped Adani from working on its railway line. Graphic: Galilee Blockade

<https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/campaign-stop-marsh-insurers-helping-adani-grows>

Campaign to stop Marsh insurers from helping Adani grows

Coral Wynter, *Green Left*, 24/05/2020

A massive 650 people from across Australia connected on Zoom on May 19 to tell Marsh McLennan Insurance Brokers not to help Adani find insurance for its controversial coal mine in the Galilee Basin in western Queensland.

Adani still needs to find an insurance company willing to cover its coal mine. It has some insurance cover, but still needs other aspects of work to be insured.

<https://www.couriermail.com.au/business/adani-seals-biggest-contract-for-carmichael-project/news-story/0b6023e602d-39b008ea18ca632a907d8>

Adani seals biggest contract for Carmichael project

Glen Norris, *Courier-Mail*, 05/06/2020

Mining giant Adani has awarded its largest construction contract to date for the Carmichael project providing a welcome 600 job boost to the region.

Adani Mining chief executive Lucas

Dow said Queensland-based BMD had been awarded the \$350 million contract to build civil construction works for the Carmichael Rail Network, taking the total value of contracts awarded to over \$1 billion.

The civil works to be built include earthworks, drainage, bridges, rail camp construction and associated road upgrades.

COAL ROCKS ON

<https://www.afr.com/rear-window/industry-associations-dance-around-fake-coal-scandal-20200511-p54rtp>

Industry associations dance around fake coal scandal

Liam Walsh, *AFR*, 11/05/2020

An astounding scandal this year has been the manipulation of coal quality results, but an extra kick in the teeth comes from the meekness of some industry organisations.

To recap: major global laboratory outfit, Brisbane-based ALS, admitted 45% to 50% of Australian coal quality certificates at its labs had been "manually amended without justification" since 2007.

So that means alterations boosted supposed coal quality for multiple miners' certificates. ALS has even gone to the cops.

It all stemmed from Federal Circuit Court allegations from a former senior manager at coal miner TerraCom, although TerraCom is rejecting any claims of wrongdoing. The lawsuit also claims another massive testing outfit, Geneva-based SGS, had fiddled with results and Singapore commodity trading outfit Noble had a hand in the scheme. SGS rejected the allegations and Noble remained mum.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2020-05-15/spot-price-for-coal-drops-by-25pc/12241502>

Thermal coal spot price tumbles 25%, putting pressure on some producers

Mike Pritchard & David Cloughton, ABC, 15/05/2020

The spot price for thermal coal has fallen 25% in the past month with one leading analyst saying it is because of a reduction in demand and a fundamental global shift to renewables.

Mining analyst Tim Buckley, from the Institute of Energy Economics and Financial Analysis, said the fall had "left a significant number of Australian and Hunter Valley thermal coal producers under water and globally there is a significant impact".

He estimates 60% of global coal production is now unprofitable and 30% of Australian producers are also running at a loss.

The chief executive of the New South Wales Minerals Council, Stephen Galilee, acknowledged the industry faced challenging times ahead, but said he expected good prices to return, especially as key markets like China resumed normal activity after COVID-19.

<https://www.smh.com.au/environment/climate-change/while-the-world-looked-the-other-way-corporate-giants-abandoned-coal-20200514-p54ssi.html>

While the world looked the other way, corporate giants abandoned coal

Bob Carr, SMH, 15/05/2020

Can we deal with a pandemic and global warming at once – both urgent, one an immediate hit, the other a decade-long burn? Well, yes, because – even with front pages dominated by COVID-19 – last month saw an astonishing concentration of decisions by international corporates to ditch carbon.

And they slipped by, with the world looking the other way.

Apart from anything else, April's tilt against thermal coal puts paid to dreams in Canberra of a new coal-fired plant. After last month's shift, nobody will invest in it, nobody will insure it.

April brought announcements from Japan's three largest institutional banks to exclude any financing of new coal-fired power. One, Mizuho, had been the world's largest private financier of coal.

• Bob Carr, a Australian former foreign affairs minister and NSW Labor premier, is a professor of climate and business at UTS.

<https://www.frasercoastchronicle.com.au/news/mines-shed-hundreds-of-jobs-amid-coal-price-collap/4015889/>

Mines shed hundreds of jobs amid coal price collapse

Melanie Whiting, Fraser Coast Chronicle, 14/05/2020

At least 200 contract jobs have been slashed across several Central Queensland mine sites amid a collapse in thermal and coking coal prices.

Peabody's Coppabella Mine has cut 50 contract positions and Middlemount Coal has temporarily suspended 20 contract positions at its Bowen Basin mine.

It is understood a further 20 contract roles have been slashed at Curragh Mine.

Fitzroy Australia Resources announced on Tuesday that 160 contract positions at Carborough Downs mine had been cut.

A Middlemount Coal spokesman said "global economic shutdowns driven by COVID-19" had forced the company to slow production at Middlemount Mine.

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/may/21/koalas-localised-extinction-planned-nsw-shenhua-coalmine>

Koalas headed for 'localised extinction' at planned NSW Shenhua coalmine site

Lisa Cox, Guardian, 21/05/2020

Koalas on the site of the planned Shenhua Watermark coalmine in NSW are heading towards localised extinction "even before the mine commences", according to company documents.

Meeting minutes for the mine's koala technical working group say there has been a steep drop in koala populations at the mine site in the Liverpool Plains.

Experts who sit on the working group have raised concerns the clearing of habitat for the project will accelerate this decline at a time when the species

is under pressure as a result of bushfires, drought and chlamydia.

The Environmental Defenders Office has written to the state government on behalf of the Lock the Gate Alliance, asking it to suspend the approvals process for Shenhua's koala management plan because the full impact of the project on the threatened species "cannot be adequately assessed" until the damage to koala populations and habitat in NSW caused by the bushfires is fully understood.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2020-05-20/olive-downs-coking-coal-mine-gains-environmental-approval/12262464>

Pembroke wins Olive Downs coking coal mine approval with \$1 million environmental condition

Meg Bolton, ABC, 22/05/2020

A new coking-coal mine has been approved for Queensland's Bowen Basin on the condition the company provides money to protect koalas and greater gliders in the area.

The open-cut mine will have an impact over an 16,300 hectare footprint.

More than 90% of the product from the Olive Downs mine will be metallurgical coal, which is used for steelmaking.

But the environmental contributions were a "pittance", according to Michael Kane, a community organiser from the Mackay Conservation Group.

"This mine will destroy 6,000ha of koala habitat, it will have an impact over 41,000ha of potential agricultural land and it will affect 11 highly valued wetlands," Kane said

He said a \$100,000 a year was "not going to cut any kind of compensation".

Once constructed, the project will operate for 79 years and will be the 27th coal mine in the Isaac Region.

<https://www.smh.com.au/environment/conservation/bulging-valleys-call-for-state-to-halt-catchment-coal-mining-20200529-p54xrw.html>

'Bulging valleys': Call for state to halt catchment coal mining

Peter Hannam, SMH, 01/06/2020

A coalition of scientists is calling on Premier Gladys Berejiklian to halt coal mining in Greater Sydney's water catchment.

In a letter sent to Berejiklian, more than 20 scientists and academics are calling for a stop on approvals for new mines in the Special Areas and

those being considered for expansion or modification. The freeze should remain until the impacts of mining “can be reliably assessed and quantified with a high degree of scientific confidence”.

Disappearing creeks, bulging valleys, a shifting dam wall and a lack of monitoring are among the reasons to halt the mining.

The missive comes as the Department of Planning restarts the approval process for the proposed expansions of the Russell Vale and Dendrobium mines, and three months after it gave the go-ahead for the Metropolitan mine to extract coal from under Woronora reservoir.

The extent of risks, though, remains hard to assess in part because of poor access to miners’ data. Monitoring systems themselves lack necessary scale and complexity, while failed groundwater instruments “are typically not replaced”.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-06-04/tahmoor-mine-polluting-nepean-and-bargo-rivers/12315440>

Tahmoor mine polluting water in Bargo and Nepean rivers with ‘cocktail of metals’

Jonathan Hair, ABC, 04/06/2020

Experts have warned about polluted water running off a mine site and ending up in a major river which eventually supplies some of Sydney’s water.

Researchers from Western Sydney University have found a “cocktail of metals” in the Tahmoor coal mine’s run-off which flows into the Bargo and Nepean rivers in south-west Sydney.

Testing results show salinity levels, and a range of elements like nitrogen, nickel and zinc, at points on the Bargo and Nepean far exceed Australian water quality guidelines.

An application to extend the life of the mine by more than a decade is currently being considered by the NSW Government.

“This is highly contaminated water. It is full of algae, full of a cocktail of metals, including arsenic, and one of them is uranium,” water expert Ian Wright said.

The Tahmoor underground mine is owned by GFG Alliance and is located a few kilometres upstream of where the Bargo and Nepean rivers meet.

<https://www.smh.com.au/environment/sustainability/coal-miner-investigated-for-pollution-spill-as-it-eyes-expansion-20200603-p54yx0.html>

Coal miner investigated for pollution spill as it eyes expansion

Peter Hannam, SMH, 03/06/2020

A coal mine south of Sydney seeking approval to expand is being investigated by regulators for a recent pollution spill into a nearby river that feeds popular water holes used for swimming.

The Tahmoor Colliery, owned by “green steel” investor Sanjeev Gupta, is hoping to extend its life beyond the closure date of 2022 to 2035, maintaining a workforce of about 600 staff.

The Tahmoor North section of the mine has also caused damage to some 720 homes because of subsidence from the underground operations, according to its managing director, Peter Vale.

The proposed extension – which would lift annual output of coking coal from about 2 million to 3 million tonnes – is projected by the government’s Subsidence Advisory NSW to affect 1333 more homes. For more than 90% of the house, though, the effects would be “very negligible”, Vale said.

<https://www.smh.com.au/environment/sustainability/subsidence-from-coal-mine-near-sydney-leaves-creek-smashed-up-20200604-p54zjp.html>

Subsidence from coal mine near Sydney leaves creek ‘smashed up’

Peter Hannam, SMH, 04/06/2020

Environmental groups have warned that severe damage done by a coal mine to creeks south of Sydney will likely be replicated if the company is allowed to expand.

Redbank Creek, which flows into the Nepean River, was undermined by the Tahmoor Colliery, leaving parts of the stream bank buckled and broken. A visit by the Herald on Wednesday also found pools of stagnant water.

“It’s high in the periodic table, including nickel, zinc, barium, strontium, lithium. Zinc and nickel are known toxins,” said Ian Wright, a senior lecturer at Western Sydney University, during the visit. “It’s also got very low oxygen content.”

The cracking and diversion of water are caused by the extraction of coal from below, with nearby Myrtle Creek similarly damaged, Dr Wright said.

A spokeswoman for the Department of Planning said the colliery has been asked to address issues raised by gov-

ernment agencies including Subsidence Advisory NSW.

“Once the Department finalises its assessment, the project will be referred to the Independent Planning Commission for a public hearing before a final determination is made,” she said.

Julie Sheppard, a spokeswoman for the National Parks Association, said they were “desperate” for the Tahmoor South project to go before the commission.

The existing mine had turned Redbank Creek into “a mish-mash”, she said. “Instead of a pristine stream, it’s just smashed up.”

<https://www.couriermail.com.au/news/regional/claims-workers-are-being-silenced-a-month-after-tragedy/news-story/95a0885a8e0f8f5f2741ea8c3b3e19e5>

Claims workers are being silenced a month after tragedy

Melanie Whiting, Courier Mail, 04/06/2020

Workers at the site of last month’s underground explosion say they are facing constant pressure to stay quiet about safety concerns, a miners’ union has claimed.

It comes as investigations into the Grosvenor Mine tragedy – which left five workers with serious burns – continue a month after the explosion.

CFMEU Mining and Energy Queensland president Stephen Smyth said whatever the source of ignition, the risk of methane explosion was not controlled on the day of the incident.

“We know that workers have come under pressure not to speak up about their concerns,” Smyth said.

“The 100% casual or contractor work model at Grosvenor exacerbates workers’ anxiety about speaking up, because they know they could be fired any time for any reason.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-06-05/high-court-to-decide-fate-of-new-acland-coal-mine/12311734>

New Acland Coal mine saga headed to High Court after leave granted to hear farmers’ appeal

Nathan Morris, Lucy Robinson & Elly Bradfield, ABC, 05/06/2020

More than 60 landholders fighting the expansion of a coal mine on Queensland’s Darling Downs have been granted leave by the High Court to appeal a finding against them last year.

Since 2007, the Oakey Coal Action Alliance (OCCA) has been challenging

plans by New Acland Coal (NAC) for a Stage 3 expansion at the mine, 180 kilometres west of Brisbane.

Last year, the Queensland Court of Appeal ruled against OCCA, finding that a 2017 Land Court decision against the mine was affected by apprehended bias.

But the court did not invalidate the whole Land Court judgment.

This morning, the High Court agreed to hear OCCA's argument that for clarity and fairness the matter should be reheard.

Aileen Harrison, 84, is the president of OCCA and has been pursued by NAC for hundreds of thousands in court costs awarded in last year's Court of Appeal orders.

"I feel probably the most relieved I've ever been," Harrison said.

"Even though I know we've still got a long way to go through the High Court, it's given us a little bit of hope."

Dust and noise from mining activities forced Ms Harrison and her family to sell their previous property to New Hope Group.

She still farms not far from the mine.

<https://www.smh.com.au/business/the-economy/surg-ing-renewables-covid-19-pile-more-pressure-on-coal-20200603-p54z4d.html>

Surging renewables, COVID-19 pile more pressure on coal

Nick Toscano & Mike Foley, SMH, 08/06/2020

Australia's renewable energy output is on track to post its sharpest rise on record in the next two years, driving down power prices and intensifying the prospect of early closures of coal-fired power plants across the country.

Independent modelling from global energy giant Schneider Electric, the nation's largest corporate energy adviser, forecasts that wind, solar and hydro power's share of the main grid will surge as much as 6 percentage points this year – from 21% to 27% – and could exceed 30% by the end of 2021.

UBS utilities analyst Tom Allen said the coronavirus crisis was exacerbating the impact of rising renewables on coal power plants as low demand and low power prices forced them to scale back their output where possible.

Due to their lack of ability to ramp up and down, as well as aggressive state-based renewable energy targets, Allen said Victoria's Yallourn coal-fired

power plant and Queensland's Gladstone plant were at the greatest risk of closing sooner than expected, as early as 2025.

OIL & GAS LEAKS

<https://www.crikey.com.au/2020/05/15/duterte-philippines-broadcasting/>

Not quite as it seems

Andrew P Street, Crikey, 15/05/2020

The NSW Narrabri Shire Council have added insult to chemotherapy by removing Councillor Ann Loder on the grounds that she failed to attend three consecutive council meetings without taking approved leave.

This reportedly came as a surprise to Loder since the reason for absence was her treatment and surgery for breast cancer, about which the mayor and council had been advised.

The decision just so happens to coincide with the council's discussion about approving the controversial Narrabri Gas Project. Dum dum duuuuummm!

Former MP for New England Tony Windsor has his own theory about why it happened, tweeting "Narrabri Council sacks cancer suffering councillor on a technicality to change voting balance. Nothing to do with a large gas field of course! Callous treatment of a community contributor who deserved support rather than the three card trick."

<https://www.smh.com.au/business/companies/santos-cool-on-covid-19-taskforce-s-6b-gas-pipe-dream-20200528-p54xaf.html>

Santos cool on COVID-19 taskforce's \$6b gas pipe dream

Nick Toscano, SMH, 28/05/2020

The head of energy giant Santos has likened a proposed \$6 billion trans-Australian pipeline to an admission of defeat, saying there are vast gas reserves yet to be tapped in the nation's south-east.

Long-mooted plans for a massive pipeline to send cheap gas from Western Australia to the east-coast market have been revived under the Morrison government's COVID-19 recovery taskforce, which is exploring potential stimulus options to drive a "gas-fired recovery" from the coronavirus crisis and support jobs.

Santos chief executive Kevin Gallagher has applauded the commission's focus on increasing gas supply to drive economic activity in the post-lockdown

period but said the proposed government-subsidised pipeline would be a complicated and unnecessary pursuit

<https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/narrabri-gas-project-to-truly-end-nsw-power-price-pain/news-story/1123f3c40632b4c5c20ac46606ac2a00>

Narrabri gas project: Plans could reduce NSW prices and spur our COVID-19 recovery

John Rolfe, Daily Telegraph, 25/05/2020

Approving the long-delayed Narrabri gas project is the "best answer" to driving down prices in the NSW market, according to federal Energy Minister Angus Taylor.

He also called for a decision "as soon as reasonably possible", amid concerns of a further blowout in power prices.

In an exclusive interview with *The Daily Telegraph*, Taylor said Australia was "incredibly well positioned" to recover from the coronavirus crisis and that NSW had an extra advantage because of the deal struck in January between the Morrison and Berejiklian governments that will add 70 petajoules of gas to the current east coast market of 350PJ.

• *Murdoch media continues its pro-gas campaign - Ed.*

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/may/31/warning-on-use-of-fracking-chemicals-in-queenslands-channel-country>

Warning on use of fracking chemicals in Queensland's channel country

Ben Smees, Guardian, 31/05/2020

A federal government scientific report has issued a warning about chemicals used in unconventional gas drilling in the sensitive wild rivers of the Kati Thandara-Lake Eyre basin.

As the government weighs up recommendations to expand the gas industry for a post-coronavirus recovery, the western rivers of Queensland loom as a significant test for how authorities will balance economics with the environment.

The federal government's bioregional assessments program this month released a report on the region, in which it identified several significant "knowledge gaps" about the geology and the impact of gas development on the waterways, which require further study.

These gaps include whether surface infrastructure could divert floodwaters; the potential for unconventional gas developments to affect the migration of groundwater between differ-

ent formations; and the potential for the extraction of water from shallow aquifers to impact ground and surface water.

<https://phys.org/news/2020-05-chemists-toxic-chemicals-fracking-wastewater.html>

Chemists identify toxic chemicals in fracking wastewater

University of Toledo, 26/05/2020

Before water produced during hydraulic fracturing is disposed of in waterways or reused in agriculture and other industries, chemists at The University of Toledo are zeroing in on water quality and environmental concerns of fracking wastewater to determine if it is safe for reuse.

The research scientists of the new Dr. Nina McClelland Laboratory for Water Chemistry and Environmental Analysis at UToledo created a new method that simultaneously identified 201 chemical compounds in fracking wastewater, called produced water.

The research, which is published in the *Journal of Separation Science* and was carried out in collaboration with scientists at The University of Texas at Arlington, shows that many of the chemicals found in produced water are carcinogens, solvents and petroleum distillates that can directly contaminate drinking water sources.

<https://www.boilingcold.com.au/waitisia-gives-mc-gowan-gas-powered-climate-dilemma/>

Waitisia gives McGowan a gas-powered climate dilemma

Peter Milne, Boiling Cold, 29/05/2020

Premier Mark McGowan may soon have to choose between reversing his past efforts in tackling climate change or potentially crossing WA's dominant media owner months before a State election, thanks to the Waitisia gas field near Dongara.

Mitsui, the operator of Waitisia, wants to expand a small 20 terajoule a day plant now under construction to be able to produce 250 TJ of gas a day, more than 20% of the state's consumption.

Kerry Stokes – chair of Seven West Media, the owner of The West Australian and Channel 7 – has a significant stake in Beach Energy that owns 50% of Waitisia. Waitisia will force the McGowan Government to revisit an issue it has struggled with in the past: what responsibility the gas industry should take for making WA the only state with rising carbon emissions.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/jun/04/chevron-could-be-forced-to-pay-100m-for-failure-to-capture-carbon-emissions>

Chevron could be forced to pay \$100m for failure to capture carbon emissions

Adam Morton, Guardian, 04/06/2020

Oil and gas company Chevron could be required to pay for offsets worth more than \$100m for carbon dioxide emissions released at a delayed carbon capture and storage (CCS) project in northern Western Australia, an analysis suggests.

The state government against Chevron over an emissions condition that applies to the company's large Gorgon liquefied natural gas (LNG) development on Barrow Island in the Pilbara.

Campaigners and analysts said it would be impossible for the company to meet the 80% target given it sequestered no emissions in the first three years, and it should have to pay for carbon reduction projects equivalent to the excess CO2 released.

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/jun/03/vladimir-putin-orders-state-of-emergency-huge-fuel-spill-siberia-power-plant-kerch>

Putin orders state of emergency after huge fuel spill inside Arctic Circle

Guardian, 03/06/2020

Vladimir Putin has ordered a state of emergency after 20,000 tonnes of diesel fuel spilled into a river inside the Arctic Circle.

The spill occurred when a fuel reservoir at a power plant near the city of Norilsk collapsed on Friday.

The plant is operated by a division of Nor Nickel, whose factories in the area have made the city one of the most heavily polluted places on Earth.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-06-07/seismic-testing-reducing-fishing-catch-on-east-coast/12297830>

Victorian fishers say catch has dropped by 80% since the start of seismic testing

Rio Davis & Andy Burns, ABC, 07/06/2020

Fishers operating in Victoria's east say their catch is down by as much as 80% since the start of seismic testing in the area.

Tyson Pollard and his father Tony have been octopus fishing for three years and their catch is sent from Lakes Entrance to Melbourne and Sydney.

Pollard said he noticed a change when two large ships started surveying for oil and gas in his usual fishing area.

"New Year's Eve, the bushfires in our

region meant we had to evacuate; New Year's Day, the seismic ship activity started," he said.

NOPSEMA confirmed no inspectors had visited Lakes Entrance to investigate the claims nor consult with fishers in person.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-06-10/coal-seam-gas-farmers-queensland-insurance-pull-out-iag/12337156>

Australian farmers' insurance coverage to be pulled if CSG infrastructure is on properties

George Roberts, ABC, 10/06/2020

Australia's largest insurance company [Insurance Australia Group] says it will no longer cover farmers for public liability if they have coal seam gas (CSG) infrastructure on their property.

Key points: • IAG's decision will affect some landholders within weeks • Farmers fear they will be exposed to risks associated with groundwater contamination • The NSW Government was previously warned insurance was inadequate for contamination • The development has made farmers fearful they will have to cease farming altogether if they cannot get cover.

NUKE MADNESS

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-05-19/nt-kakadu-uranium-stoush-ranger-mine-rehabilitation/12260130>

Ranger Mine locked in stoush over funding for Kakadu uranium rehabilitation monitoring

Jane Bardon, ABC, 19/05/2020

The Federal Government is locked in a stoush with the company mining uranium on the edge of the Northern Territory's Kakadu National Park over whether it will continue to fund monitoring of the site's rehabilitation.

Key points: ERA has asked for a review of its \$2.5 million annual research funding commitments • The Commonwealth said it is unfortunate that ERA has decided to "dispute" its contribution • An independent adviser said funding must be assured for decades of monitoring.

Energy Resources of Australia (ERA) has flagged it wants to pull out of paying \$2.5 million a year for the Supervising Scientist Branch independent monitoring agency, which it funds with the Commonwealth, at the end of June.

Community members of ERA's independent technical consultation committee, including Dr Gavin Mudd, an Associate Professor of Environmental

Engineering at RMIT University, have been told by the Supervising Scientist Branch its future research is in doubt because of the funding uncertainty.

“That funding is no longer guaranteed for next year is a major concern,” Dr Mudd said.

“This work is needed to give us confidence that what is done at Ranger actually works, including the restoration of ecosystems, how stable the landform is, the radioactivity and the surface and groundwater water quality issues.”

Dr Mudd said failures in the rehabilitation of other Northern Territory uranium mines, including Rum Jungle near Bachelor, have demonstrated that there will need to be monitoring for decades after Ranger’s closure.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/may/21/new-nuclear-technologies-to-be-examined-in-planning-australias-energy-mix>

New nuclear technologies to be examined in planning Australia’s energy mix

Katharine Murphy, Guardian, 21/05/2020

The Morrison government has flagged examining “emerging nuclear technologies” as part of Australia’s energy mix in the future in a new discussion paper kicking off the process of developing its much-vaunted technology investment roadmap.

The new framework will identify the government’s investment priorities in emissions-reducing technologies for 2022, 2030 and 2050, although the paper makes clear the government will only countenance “incentivising voluntary emissions reductions on a broad scale” – not schemes that penalise polluters.

The discussion paper to be released on Thursday floats a range of potential technologies for future deployment, including small modular nuclear reactors. It says emerging nuclear technologies “have potential but require R&D and identified deployment pathways”.

While clearly flagging that prospect, the paper also notes that engineering, cost and environmental challenges, “alongside social acceptability of nuclear power in Australia, will be key determinants of any future deployment”.

HYDROGEN HYPE

<https://smallcaps.com.au/leigh-creek-energy-reveals-hydrogen-option-syngas-project/>

Leigh Creek Energy reveals hydrogen option for syngas project

Danica Cullinane, Small Caps, 03/06/2020

Leigh Creek Energy has announced hydrogen production as a commercialisation option for its namesake project in South Australia, claiming it could be the lowest cost producer in Australia at less than \$1 per kg.

The move will make the most of a process that is already part of the company’s strategy to produce fertiliser products from the remnant Leigh Creek coal resources in the state’s north using in-situ gasification (ISG) technology.

CLIMATE CRISIS

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/may/14/norways-giant-oil-fund-ditches-stake-in-australias-agl-over-fossil-fuel-concerns>

Norway’s giant oil fund ditches stake in Australia’s AGL over fossil fuel concerns

Ben Butler & Adam Morton, Guardian, 14/05/2020

Norway’s gigantic sovereign wealth fund has dumped its stake in the Australian energy company AGL, which owns coal-fired power stations including the carbon-intensive Liddell plant in New South Wales, after tightening up its rules on fossil fuels.

Norges Bank, which manages the US\$1.1tn Government Pension Fund Global, has also put Australian mining giant BHP on an “observation list”, placing it at risk of divestment in the future. The fund, which is so big it owns an estimated 1.5% of shares listed on the global stock exchange, invests the spoils of Norway’s own North Sea oil bonanza.

However, over the past few years it has adopted progressively stricter rules about investing in fossil fuels.

It is believed AGL has been disqualified because of its coal mine at Loy Yang in Victoria.

Glencore, which has assets in Australia and produces more than 130m tons of coal a year, has also been struck from the fund’s list of permitted investments.

Activist shareholder group the Australasian Centre for Corporate Responsibility said it showed that AGL and BHP, which it described as “iconic” Australian companies, were both “well behind the times”.

The group’s executive director, Brynn O’Brien, said the companies did not have credible strategies to move to more climate-friendly business models.

<https://thenewdaily.com.au/life/science/environment/2020/05/14/youth-activists-clive-palmer-court/>

Youth activists to mount legal challenge against Clive Palmer coal project

AAP/New Daily

A group of young Queenslanders are challenging one of billionaire Clive Palmer’s companies to try to block a proposed Galilee Basin coal project on the grounds that it is a human rights violation.

The environment group says allowing the project to go ahead would infringe its rights because it will contribute to a global climate crisis.

Waratah Coal claims to be the largest tenement holder in the Galilee Basin. It has more than 10,000 square kilometres of tenements, including 15 coal exploration permits, one mineral development licence and two mining lease applications.

Its proposed Galilee Coal Project consists of two open-cut mines, four underground long-wall mining operations, coal-handling preparation plants and a railway line to the Abbot Point coal port, north of Bowen.

It would initially mine 10 million tonnes of coal a year before increasing to 56 million tonnes several years later.

Youth Verdict is joining forces with the Bimblebox Alliance, which has been pursuing legal action in the Queensland Land Court.

The alliance said the mining project was a threat to the Bimblebox Nature Refuge, an almost 8000 hectare and largely uncleared property that balances sustainable grazing and high conservation. Objections to the granting of approval for a mining lease and environmental authority applications is being brought by the Environmental Defenders Office.

“Our clients are using the Queensland Human Rights Act, exactly as it was intended to be used, to allow Queenslanders to stand up for their human rights,” Environmental Defenders Office chief executive David Morris said.

“They have the right to a safe and healthy future and to be able to make genuine choices about their lives.

“Climate change limits those choices.”

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-05-18/four-corners-climate-change-public-servants-reveal-anger/12235180>

Australia's most senior former public servants and scientists reveal their anger about climate policy failure

Michael Brissenden, ABC, 18/05/2020

For more than 30 years, Australian politics has been grappling with climate change and the nation's most senior public servants have been there through it all.

Usually they keep their thoughts private, rarely making a foray into public debate, even in retirement.

Now, after the devastating "black summer" fire season, the former heads of the Office of Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Department of the Treasury, along with former chief scientists, have decided they can no longer stay silent.

They believe there has been a colossal failure by politicians of all stripes to comprehensively tackle climate change.

Four Corners interviewed Martin Parkinson, who served as secretary of the Department of Climate Change between 2007 and 2011; former chief scientist Professor Penny Sackett, who served between 2008 and 2011; Ken Henry, the former Treasury secretary for a decade from 2001 and Peter Shergold who was the head of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet at the time.

In 2010, the minority Labor government led by Julia Gillard worked with the Greens and the independents to introduce a new version of a carbon pricing mechanism.

Within months of winning the 2013 election, Abbott made good on his promise to repeal the Gillard scheme.

Dr Parkinson described that as a "grim day for Australia".

As the carbon tax repeal bills passed through the House of Representatives, jubilant government frontbenchers high-fived each other.

Dr Henry said the celebrations in the parliament that day were particularly hard to stomach.

"Honestly, I thought it was grotesque. It didn't even look like a high school schoolyard. It looked like a primary school schoolyard. Terrible," he said.

Australia will be under pressure to pledge to reach zero net emissions by 2050, but the Morrison government has said it will not mandate a specific

target and that technology will get us there without the need for taxes.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/may/18/for-your-children-former-top-australian-public-servants-call-for-carbon-price>

'For your children': former top Australian public servants call for carbon price

Adam Morton, Guardian, 18/05/2020

Former senior public servants have called for the re-introduction of a carbon price, saying it would be the least economically damaging way to cut greenhouse gas emissions and could deliver the technological solutions the Morrison government says are needed.

In interviews on ABC TV's Four Corners, several ex-top advisors expressed frustration and in some cases anger about the country's failure to introduce durable policies to address climate change.

Peter Shergold, the head of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet in the final years of the Howard government, was asked what he would say to the prime minister, Scott Morrison, if he held that position now.

He said he would tell him: "My sense, prime minister, is that there is a mood to follow such leadership if it exists. Tell it honestly, and tell it truthfully, and don't try and pretend there are not going to be costs imposed on industry and costs imposed on individuals, but it is worth that for the sake of your children and your grandchildren."

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-05-19/morrison-opens-way-to-paying-for-cleaner-coal-with-climate-funds/12261612>

Morrison Government opens door to paying for cleaner coal and gas with climate funds

Dan Conifer, ABC, 19/05/2020

Coal and gas-related projects could soon be funded by the Commonwealth Government through its clean energy financing agencies.

Key points: • The Government responded to a review of its \$2 billion Climate Solutions Fund • It agreed in principle that its agencies should work together "across sectors" • It opens the door for funding of lower-emissions coal or gas power generation.

fossilfool.com.au

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/may/29/rapid-shift-to-renewable-energy-could-lead-australia-to-cheap-power-and-100000-jobs>

Rapid shift to renewable energy could lead Australia to cheap power and 100,000 jobs

Adam Morton, Guardian, 29/05/2020

A dramatic expansion of renewable energy over the next five years could establish Australia as a home for new zero-emissions industries, cut electricity costs and create more than 100,000 jobs in the electricity industry alone, a new analysis suggests.

The briefing paper by Beyond Zero Emissions, a climate change think-tank, presents an alternative vision to the Morrison government's gas-fired recovery plan, arguing the shift to a clean electricity grid is inevitable and there are opportunities in accelerating it, rather than slowing it down. Renewable energy investment in Australia fell 50% last year.

The work is backed by the former prime minister Malcolm Turnbull, who described the central thesis of the report as "compellingly right".

"That is, we have the opportunity to have zero emissions and cheap energy in Australia if we get over the political roadblock that has bedevilled the debate for so long."

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/environment/climate-news/300028260/greenhouse-gases-in-the-air-reach-a-global-record-high>

Greenhouse gases in the air reach a global record high

Andrew Freedman & Chris Mooney, Stuff, 05/06/2020

A crucial metric for determining the severity of global warming – the amount of greenhouse gases actually in the air – just hit a record high.

According to readings from the Scripps Institution of Oceanography and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the amount of CO2 in the air in May 2020 hit an average of slightly greater than 417 parts per million (ppm). This is the highest monthly average value ever recorded, and is up from 414.7 ppm in May of last year.

Carbon dioxide levels are the highest they've been in human history, and likely the highest in 3 million years. The last time there was this much CO2 in the atmosphere, our early human ancestors lived in Africa, global average surface temperatures were significantly warmer, and sea levels were 15 - 24 metres higher.

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/jun/06/nsw-government-abandons-plan-for-air-pollution-policy-after-five-years-of-planning>

NSW government abandons plan for air pollution policy after five years of planning

Lisa Cox, *Guardian*, 06/06/2020

The Berejiklian government has abandoned a long-held commitment to adopt a statewide policy on air pollution after years of planning that included a state summit on the issue.

The decision to drop a standalone clean air strategy has sparked anger from communities living near major sources of pollution, such as coal-fired power stations, who say without an overarching strategy they can have no confidence their air quality will improve.

FOSSIL POLITICS

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-05-13/coronavirus-recovery-to-push-australia-towards-gas-future/12239978>

Coronavirus economic recovery committee looks set to push Australia towards gas-fired future

Elysse Morgan & Stephen Long, *ABC*, 13/05/2020

There's a battle of ideas over how to reinvigorate the economy after the shock of COVID-19, but the make-up of the advisory body the Federal Government has set up to lead the recovery gives a good indication of which way it's leaning.

Amid calls for new investment in clean energy to cut greenhouse gas emissions and revive the economy, the Government's given the task of leading the recovery to a committee that's overweight with business leaders from fossil fuel industries, and gas in particular.

The National COVID-19 Coordination Commission – a hand-picked panel of business leaders and trusted bureaucrats charged with facilitating the “fastest recovery possible” – is headed by Nev Power, the former CEO of iron ore miner Fortescue Metals.

Power is now a director and major shareholder of oil and gas company, Strike Energy.

When asked if this presented any conflict of interest given his role at the commission and his focus on energy, Power said he supported all types of energy.

Power has also publicly supported the increased manufacture of gas-dependent petrochemicals, fertilisers and

agrichemicals. And he's backed the development of an ammonia plant in the NSW town of Narrabri, put forward by West Australian businessman Vikas Rambal, that could kickstart Santos's contentious Narrabri Gas Project.

One of Power's early acts was to bring into the commission as a special adviser Andrew Liveris, former global chairman and CEO of The Dow Chemical Company.

Liveris is deputy chairman of Worley, the world's biggest engineering consultancy for the oil and gas industry, and also a director of the world's biggest oil and gas company, Saudi Aramco, which is looking at gas development in Australia.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/may/13/zali-steggall-increasingly-concerned-about-morrison-governments-covid-commission>

Zali Steggall increasingly concerned about Morrison government's Covid Commission

Katharine Murphy, *Guardian*, 13/05/2020

The independent MP Zali Steggall says she is increasingly concerned about the Morrison government's influential National Covid Coordination Commission, because there is “no transparency about its governance or processes”.

With representatives of the commission to appear before a Senate inquiry to answer questions about the Covid-19 response on Wednesday, Steggall said the body needed “transparency, proper governance, and independent reporting so the Australian people know what it is considering, and why it's considering it, and what it is recommending to government”.

“It also needs a clear disclosure process for conflicts of interest,” she said.

<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/nsw/all-controversial-projects-determined-in-12-weeks-minister-demands-20200513-p54snb.html>

All controversial projects determined in 12 weeks, Minister demands

Lisa Visentin, *SMH*, 14/05/2020

The Independent Planning Commission will have 12 weeks to decide whether to approve controversial developments and mining projects, as part of the government's push to ensure timely decision-making.

The three-month timeframe will now apply to all projects for which the commission must hold public hearings, not just the controversial Narrabri Gas Project which was capped at 12 weeks earlier this year.

The commission will be given eight weeks to determine projects that need only a public meeting, while uncontroversial projects that do not require any public hearings or meetings must be decided in five weeks.

NSW Planning Minister Rob Stokes advised the commission of the new benchmarks in a written “statement of expectations” obtained by the Herald.

Contentious projects in the pipeline include the Whitehaven Coal Vickery mine extension near Gunnedah, and McPhillamys Gold Project in central-western NSW.

<https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/news/politics/2020/05/16/national-covid-19-coordination-commission-scrutinised/15895512009844>

National Covid-19 Coordination Commission scrutinised

Mike Secombe, *Saturday Paper*, 16/05/2020

Neville Power, the mining company executive hand-picked by the prime minister to lead the body planning Australia's recovery in the post-Covid-19 world, was a no-show on Wednesday.

And that was a great pity, for the senate select committee established to inquire into the Australian government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic had a lot of questions that no one else seemed able to answer.

Such as what exactly the National Covid-19 Coordination Commission (NCCC) is actually doing to further its objective of “mobilising a whole-of-society and whole-of-economy effort” to ameliorate the economic impact of the virus. And how Power came to be appointed to the commission, and when and why.

And how the rest of the NCCC, many of whom have connections to the fossil fuel industry, came to be appointed. And what records were being kept of the commission's meetings and dealings. And by whom the NCCC was directed and to whom it would report, and when, and whether its recommendations would be made public. And how various other advisers to the commission, described as “appendages”, came to be appointed to their influential roles.

One of those “appendages” is Andrew Liveris, former chair and chief executive of the Dow Chemical Company, one of the world's biggest chemical manufacturers and a major producer of fertiliser, who is currently on the board of the Saudi petroleum giant

Aramco. While the senate committee was unable to find out how Liveris came to be appointed as a special adviser to the commission, it did learn that he was not bound by any requirement to disclose his interests or potential conflicts.

In 2016, Liveris was chosen by President Donald Trump to lead his American Manufacturing Council. Appearing with Trump for the announcement, he said: "I tingle with pride listening to you."

<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/government-looks-to-carbon-capture-for-climate-action-20200518-p54u4n.html>

Government looks to carbon capture for climate action

Mike Foley, SMH, 18/05/2020

The Morrison government is considering legislative changes to allow its clean energy agencies to fund carbon capture and storage from fossil fuel projects in a bid to unlock \$2 billion of private investment to reduce greenhouse gases.

Energy and Emissions Reduction Minister Angus Taylor has accepted 21 of the 26 recommendations from an independent panel reviewing the \$2 billion Emissions Reduction Fund, including all those relating to carbon capture and storage.

The panel, chaired by former Business Council of Australia president Grant King, said the government would attract more private investment in the Emissions Reduction Fund if legislation were amended to "enable a method to be developed for carbon capture and storage".

The King report also recommended an "expanded, technology-neutral remit" for the Clean Energy Finance Corp (CEFC) and the Australian Renewable Energy Agency so they too could attract more private investment in a wider range of technologies outside renewables, such as coal or gas-fired power incorporating carbon capture and storage.

Carbon capture and storage, which has not yet been successfully implemented on a commercial basis, involves capturing carbon dioxide from industrial processes and transporting it to a suitable storage site for safe, long-term storage deep underground.

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/may/19/coalition-reveals-new-emissions-reduction-measures-including-paying-polluters-to-stay-under-cap>

Coalition reveals new emissions reduction measures, including paying polluters to stay under cap

Adam Morton, Guardian, 19/05/2020

The Morrison government has promised new measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, including introducing an incentive scheme to allow big industrial polluters to earn revenue by emitting less than an agreed limit.

It also plans to allow businesses to bid for funding from its main climate policy, the \$2.55bn emissions reduction fund, for projects that capture emissions and either use them or store them underground.

<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/taylor-stares-down-objections-to-carbon-capture-schemes-in-2-billion-fund-20200519-p54ui9.html>

Taylor stares down objections to carbon capture schemes in \$2 billion fund

David Crowe, SMH, 19/05/2020

Energy Minister Angus Taylor will fast-track changes to a \$2 billion climate fund as he rejects furious criticism of a new plan to spend its cash on carbon capture and storage projects.

Taylor called on the government's critics to give up their "ideology" in opposing the controversial projects and said he would consider putting changes to the Parliament to overcome their objections.

Labor branded the fund an "abject failure" and said it would consider the new review, while the Greens attacked carbon capture as "greenwashing" because it would help subsidise projects that burned coal or gas.

<https://www.crikey.com.au/2020/05/19/carbon-capture-cash-capture/>

Carbon capture and storage a dud but fossil fuel industry's cash capture working well

Bernard Keane, Crikey, 19/05/2020

Here's how power works in an openly corrupt outfit like the Morrison government.

An "Emissions Reduction Fund" (ERF), dreamt up as political cover for the Coalition's climate denialism, was so spectacularly unsuccessful at reducing emissions that the Coalition was embarrassed into reviewing it, tasking two former fossil fuel company executives to report back on ways it could

be improved. They've recommended that the scheme be further expanded for fossil fuel donors to the Coalition to receive more funding and produce more greenhouse emissions.

That's why this isn't really a story about climate or energy, but about political influence being used to secure taxpayer funding in a twisted version of industry policy. Fossil fuel donors to the Coalition will benefit from taxpayer handouts on the recommendation of former fossil fuel executives appointed by the Coalition. It's the way power is used in this corrupt government.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-05-21/national-coordination-commission-plan-gas-manufacturing/12269100>

Government's COVID Commission manufacturing plan calls for huge public gas subsidies

Stephen Long, ABC, 21/05/2020

State bans on coal seam gas development would be scrapped and the Federal Government would underwrite gas prices and massively subsidise costs and investment for gas companies, under confidential plans for a "gas-led manufacturing recovery" post-COVID-19.

Key points: • Leaked documents reveal a draft plan calling for massive gas subsidies and public investment • The interim report also calls for reduced 'green and red tape' and an end to all fracking moratoriums in NSW and Victoria • The National COVID Coordination Commission has several members with deep links to the gas industry.

The draft plans, seen by the ABC, call for the scrapping of "green and red tape" on gas development, including a relaxation of Australian standards for equipment used in gas infrastructure and a loosening of environmental regulations and approval processes.

They are set out in an interim report from the manufacturing taskforce of the National COVID Coordination Commission (NCCC).

The taskforce says the Government should be "taking a non-operating equity position, minority share, or underwriting position" in gas projects and "provide support, such as low-cost capital, to existing small and mid-cap market participants".

It also wants mechanisms to put a government-guaranteed floor under gas prices, so companies can borrow against that guaranteed price.

And the NCCC wants massive government spending to underwrite a network of new pipelines linking gas projects in the north-west of Western Australia to the east coast.

West Australian businessman Nev Power, who chairs the NCCC, is a director and shareholder of WA-based Strike Energy, which aspires to be “the lowest cost onshore gas producer in Australia” and would potentially benefit from government investment subsidies and the underwriting of gas pipelines.

The NCCC report seen by the ABC advocates “accelerated developments for highly prospective opportunities” including the Perth Basin, which is Strike Energy’s main exploration area.

The commission’s special advisor on manufacturing renewal, former Dow Chemical global chairman and CEO Andrew Liveris, is deputy chairman of the world’s biggest oil and gas consultancy and engineering firm, Worley, and is also a director of Saudi Aramco, the world’s biggest oil and gas company, which has ambitions to invest in Australia.

“It’s a blueprint for the gas industry, it’s not a manufacturing blueprint, it’s pathetic,” said Tim Buckley, director of energy research at the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis, who spent 30 years in senior roles in investment banking.

Buckley said there was a huge irony that the gas industry’s massive, unprofitable investment in three giant gas export terminals off the coast of Queensland was responsible for a massive rise in gas prices for Australian industry.

Dan Gocher, director of climate and environment at the Australasian Centre for Corporate Responsibility, accuses the industry of using COVID-19 as cover.

“This is predatory behaviour from the gas industry,” he argued.

“They are opportunistically using the COVID-19 crisis to push through uneconomic, polluting plans dependent on taxpayer subsidies, which until the pandemic hit were beyond their wildest dreams.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/may/21/leaked-covid-19-commission-report-calls-for-australian-taxpayers-to-underwrite-gas-industry-expansion>

Leaked Covid-19 commission report calls for Australian taxpayers to underwrite gas industry expansion

Adam Morton, *Guardian*, 21/05/2020

Australian taxpayers should underwrite a massive expansion of the domestic gas industry – including helping open new fields and build hundreds of kilometres of pipelines – according to a group advising on Covid-19 recovery.

A leaked draft report by a manufacturing taskforce advising the National Covid-19 Coordination Commission (NCCC) recommends the Morrison government make sweeping changes to “create the market” for gas and build fossil fuel infrastructure that would operate for decades.

Its vision includes Canberra underwriting an increased national gas supply, government agencies partnering with companies to accelerate development of new fields, and states introducing subsidy schemes for gas-fired power plants.

It says the federal government should help develop gas pipelines between eastern states and the north, and potentially a \$6bn trans-Australian pipeline between the east and west, by either taking an equity position, minority share or underwriting investments.

Emma Herd, the chief executive of the Investor Group on Climate Change, representing investors managing \$2tn in assets, said the taskforce’s proposals could expose Australia to future economic shocks and billions of dollars in public and private sector investment being wasted as global markets moved to cut emissions.

Other recommendations from the taskforce include:

- Considering tax incentives for priority gas infrastructure.
- Lifting remaining gas exploration moratoria in New South Wales and Victoria, and easing regulations in the Northern Territory to allow quicker access to new supply from the massive Beetaloo Basin.
- Using a reverse auction “contract-for-difference” scheme, such as that used for wind and solar in Victoria, for state governments to buy gas-fired power at lowest cost.
- Providing support, such as low-cost capital, for existing small and medium-sized gas companies to invest.

- Rapidly cutting regulations, described as “green and red tape”, to allow developments.

- Introducing gas reservation policies for the NT and east coast developments, as exist in Western Australia, to ensure not all gas is exported.

On electricity generation, the taskforce says gas-fired power is central to more rapid adoption of renewable energy at lowest cost, and could contribute 10-15% of total generation as back-up for wind and solar as coal declines. If gas prices stay low, it says combined-cycle gas generation – a form of “baseload” power that the federal government has not backed as part of the future – would “likely expand significantly”.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-05-21/federal-government-releases-emissions-technology-roadmap/12269010>

Federal Government releases emissions technology investment roadmap, backing gas and a shift towards renewables

Jade Macmillan, *ABC*, 21/05/2020

The Federal Government has unveiled its long-awaited “technology investment roadmap” setting out Australia’s energy priorities as it seeks to bring down carbon emissions over the next 30 years.

Key points: • More than 140 technologies including hydrogen, renewables, biofuels and carbon capture and storage were given consideration • Australia has flexibility in using natural gas energy as the world’s largest LNG exporter • Nuclear power was acknowledged for its potential, but cost and environmental factors had to be considered.

<https://thenewdaily.com.au/news/coronavirus/2020/05/23/coronavirus-origin-study/>

China could boycott coal

New Daily, 23/05/2020

Coal exporters could be the latest victim of a trade war with China, with reports Beijing has warned state-owned power plants not to buy new shipments of Australian thermal coal.

Trade tensions have embroiled Australia’s barley and beef industry, with Beijing angered by Canberra’s call for an international inquiry into the origins of coronavirus.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/may/23/covid-commission-boss-nev-power-steps-back-at-gas-company-amid-conflict-of-interest-concerns>

Covid commission boss Nev Power steps back at gas company amid conflict of interest concerns

Ben Butler & Adam Morton, *Guardian*, 23/05/2020

The head of the Morrison government commission tasked with coming up with plans to revitalise the economy after the coronavirus crisis, Nev Power, is to step aside from his position as deputy chairman of a gas company over conflict of interest concerns.

“Because of the perceptions of conflict of interest he has stepped back from participating in board meetings and will not participate in the decisions of the board” of Strike Energy, a spokesman for the National Covid-19 Coordination Commission said on Friday evening.

The leadership position of Power, a former chief executive of mining group Fortescue Metals, on the NCCC has raised concerns about a potential conflict of interest because the commission has heavily promoted gas development as a key way to boost economic growth after the coronavirus crisis.

In addition to his position as deputy chairman of Strike Energy, Power also holds shares in the company worth more than \$2.4m and holds options over shares that will become worth an additional \$2.1m if the company’s share price rises to 35c.

Centre Alliance senator Rex Patrick said, “There is a perception of a conflict and that is problematic. One of the ways to address those concerns would be for the NCCC to open up its books to show alternatives [to gas] that were considered and enable people to see the cost-benefit analysis that’s been done to test the ideas that are coming forward,” he said. “Transparency is a disinfectant.”

Richie Merzian, from the Australia Institute, said a growing perception of a conflict of interest was cause for concern. He called on the government to ask Power to give evidence at a Senate inquiry into the management of the coronavirus crisis.

“You have gas executives handpicked by the prime minister’s office charged with shaping the economic future of this country and talking about a gas-fired recovery,” he said. “A question that should be asked is whether the prime minister and cabinet should

be stepping in before this becomes a serious political liability.”

Merzian said the lack of a transparent accountability framework meant the public could not tell if work had been done showing support for the gas industry was the best way to create jobs. He said an analysis by the institute had found the gas sector was the worst option you could choose for mass job creation. “You can invest in any other sector and create more jobs,” he said.

<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/nsw/berejiklian-government-rushes-to-defeat-csg-moratorium-bill-20200604-p54zgw.html>

Berejiklian government rushes to defeat coal seam gas moratorium bill

Lisa Visentin, *SMH*, 04/06/2020

The Berejiklian government has rushed to defeat a private member’s bill to derail the controversial Narabri gas project as anti-coal seam gas groups were preparing to target National party seats.

In a rare move, the Coalition suspended the day’s parliamentary agenda on Thursday to debate a coal seam gas moratorium bill in a bid to fast-track its demise in the Legislative Assembly.

It comes after the bill, put forward by independent MP Justin Field, passed the NSW upper house on Wednesday night with the support of Labor and the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party.

The bill, which the government voted down in the lower house, sought to impose an immediate moratorium on the prospecting or mining of coal seam gas in NSW and classifies certain areas as permanent “no go zones”.

The Country Women’s Association also wrote to all MPs on Thursday, expressing their support for the bill on the grounds there were “too many unanswered questions around the safety of this [coal seam gas] industry.

“There are still too many unknowns, and risks to natural resources and water resources to be confident with this industry,” CWA NSW chief executive Danica Leys said.

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<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/jun/04/covid-commission-chief-distances-himself-from-leaked-report-on-massive-gas-expansion>

Covid commission chief distances himself from leaked report on massive gas expansion

Katharine Murphy, *Guardian*, 04/06/2020

The former Fortescue Metals chief running Scott Morrison’s Covid-19 coordination commission, Nev Power, has distanced himself from a controversial leaked report recommending Australian taxpayers underwrite a massive expansion of the domestic gas industry.

Appearing on Thursday before a Senate committee, Power said the report should not be considered the view of the National Covid-19 Coordination Commission. He intimated the report was a draft from the manufacturing taskforce that had been superseded by later advice.

The leaked report from the taskforce headed by Andrew Liveris, a former Dow Chemical executive and current Saudi Aramco board member, recommended the government underwrite an increased national gas supply, that government agencies partner with companies to accelerate development of new gasfields, and states introduce subsidy schemes for gas-fired power plants.

It also proposed a role for government in helping develop gas pipelines between eastern states and the north, and potentially a \$6bn trans-Australian pipeline between the east and west, by either taking an equity position, minority share or underwriting investments.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/jun/05/government-refuses-to-release-conflict-of-interest-disclosures-from-covid-commission-members>

Government refuses to release conflict-of-interest disclosures from Covid commission members

Katharine Murphy, *Guardian*, 05/06/2020

Officials from Scott Morrison’s department are refusing to release conflict of interest disclosures from members of the National Covid-19 Coordination Commission so they can be scrutinised by the public because the declarations are provided “in confidence”.

The departmental pushback has come in responses to questions on-notice from the Senate committee examining the government’s response to the pandemic. The leadership position of Nev Power has raised concerns about a potential conflict of interest because

the commission has promoted gas development as a key way to boost economic growth after the coronavirus crisis.

Guardian Australia last month revealed a leaked draft report by a taskforce advising the NCCC that recommended Australian taxpayers underwrite a massive expansion of the domestic gas industry, although Power has subsequently characterised that report as an early draft.

Power has stepped aside from his position as deputy chairman of a gas company, Strike Energy, but the chairman made it clear during an appearance before the Senate committee on Thursday that he had not recused himself from NCCC discussions about developing gas during the Covid recovery.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/jun/07/renewable-energy-stimulus-three-times-as-many-australia-jobs-fossil-fuels-coronavirus-economic-recovery>

Renewable energy stimulus can create three times as many Australian jobs as fossil fuels

Adam Morton, Guardian, 08/06/2020

Stimulus programs backing clean energy as a path out of recession would create nearly three times as many jobs for every dollar spent on fossil fuel developments, according to a financial consultancy analysis.

The assessment by professional services firm Ernst & Young (EY) says a government focus on renewable energy and climate-friendly projects to drive the economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic could create more than 100,000 direct jobs across the country while cutting greenhouse gas emissions.

Commissioned by environment group the World Wide Fund for Nature, the EY report

estimates every \$1m spent on renewable energy and exports creates 4.8

full-time jobs in renewable infrastructure or 4.95 jobs in energy efficiency. By comparison, \$1m on fossil fuel projects has been found to create 1.7 full-time jobs.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-06-11/renewed-scrutiny-over-decision-not-to-protect-sacred-sites-nsw/12344422>

Renewed scrutiny over decision not to protect Aboriginal sacred sites in NSW

Hannah Sinclair, ABC, 11/06/2020

A group of traditional custodians in New South Wales have renewed calls to protect their sacred sites following Rio Tinto's blasting of a 46,000-year-old site in the Pilbara last month.

Dolly Talbott is a Gomeroi traditional custodian and said sites of significant cultural value are at risk of being destroyed in northern NSW if the controversial Chinese-owned Shenhua Watermark Mine project goes ahead in the Liverpool Plains.

The sites, south of Gunnedah, include two rare grinding grooves where it is believed warriors prepared for battle by sharpening their spears, as well as burial grounds and male ceremonial areas.

"It's our ancestral place. This is what our elders passed on to us to protect and that's why we've been fighting so hard for these sites," Talbott told 7.30.

In 2015, the traditional custodians sought protection for the sacred sites under NSW law but were knocked back.

In 2016, then-federal environment minister Greg Hunt declined to protect the sites under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act.

Labor senator Pat Dodson said it is imperative that the destruction of Aboriginal sites is removed from the mentality of decision-makers in Australia.

"I don't think it's the Minister's responsibility to weigh up whether you're going to get a certain amount of dough out of a proposition. She's got to deal with the cultural and spiritual reality of those people's heritage and give it protection," Senator Dodson told 7.30.

Shenhua declined to be interviewed but has promised to move the grinding grooves to another location.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-06-12/wa-fracking-plan-delayed-until-after-state-election/12333148>

WA fracking laws won't be passed before 2021 election, Mines and Petroleum Minister says

Ben Collins, ABC, 12/06/2020

New rules that give landowners the right to veto fracking in Western Australia will not be introduced to Parliament before the next election.

Key points: • Legislative amendments needed for private landowner consent to fracking cannot be passed before the WA state election • It is uncertain if a proposed fracking industry code of practice will also need legislation • Fracking is not permitted in WA until the landowner consent and code of practice are implemented.

The delay appears set to leave a range of proposed reforms, including a fracking industry code of practice and traditional owner consent requirements, for a future WA government to conclude.

Both the energy industry and opponents of fracking have expressed concerns about what the delays could mean for the issue.

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