



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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Oil and gas companies line up for government handouts

By Eve Sinton

As Scott Morrison's hand-picked Covid-19 commission (NCCC) lobbies for a gas-lead economic recovery, the oil and gas industry appears very happy with the direction of the commission's leaked slide presentation.

The Australian Petroleum Production & Exploration Association (APPEA) is apparently engaging with the federal government in a bid to boost exploration investment and cut regulatory hurdles.

According to *The Australian*, "quick-start" initiatives include accessing government loan guarantees to gain added security for juniors to access debt financing, promoting short-term licence permits, expanding a mining exploration tax credit incentive to the petroleum industry to spur greater investment and cutting overlapping environmental requirements between the states and the commonwealth.

Yet the oil and gas industry is floundering, slashing the value of assets worldwide, while dropping demand for oil and gas leaves laden tankers circling the ocean. Producers are desperate to wrangle deals and off-load their volatile products.

APPEA admits desperation

APPEA chief executive Andrew McConville admitted to *The Australian*: "The oil and gas industry is facing an enormous challenge in recovering from the economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.



Dropping demand for oil and gas leaves laden tankers (such as this LNG tanker) circling the ocean while companies desperately find somewhere to unload them.

Photo: Bloomberg News

"The current market conditions are arguably the most challenging the industry has ever seen with demand destruction, excess supply and oil prices falling more than 75% over the first four months of 2020. The industry faces the challenge of how to return to growth and best place the industry to respond in supporting Australia's economic recovery."

Climate activist organisation 350.org Australia is calling for the Prime Minister to immediately rule out massive public subsidies to prop up dirty industries.

"Creating special rules for the gas industry and throwing public money

at them when they are a polluting industry without a long-term future is simply reckless and should be refused.

"The [Covid-19] group is stacked with gas executives so it's no surprise that they're recommending support for dirty gas projects, but they are out of step with what the community wants, which is investment in renewable energy and the industries of our future.

Conflicts of interest not declared

A Covid-19 Senate Select Committee hearing on May 13th and documents obtained by 350.org under the Free-

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Feds push on with nuke waste dump

By Eve Sinton

In late January of this year, the federal resources minister at the time – Matt Canavan – announced that a national nuclear waste dump would be established on farming land 20km west of the small community of Kimba, South Australia.

Farmer Jeff Baldock had conveniently offered up a 160 ha property for the project. He is likely to get four times the market value for it.

The dump would house low-level waste, mainly from nuclear medicine, and provide 45 new local jobs. The community has been promised \$31 million in benefits as a reward for 62% of them voting in favour of the facility (396 to 294).

Already, there's a catch

But, already, there's a catch: the National Radioactive Waste Management Facility will also "temporarily" house medium-level waste from places such as Sydney's Lucas Heights nuclear reactor. Until somewhere else is found for the stuff.

Which is not what the community voted for, but it may very likely be forced upon them as a long-term solution for nuclear waste that will be dangerous for hundreds of thousands of years. After all, who else would want it?

The dump site is on the traditional lands of the Barngala people, few of whom were able to vote alongside the townspeople of Kimba. The Barngala conducted their own poll and were overwhelmingly against having nuke waste dumped on their land.

Matt Canavan has since resigned as resources minister, to support Barnaby Joyce in a failed National Party leadership coup.

His replacement, Keith Pitt, has wasted no time pushing ahead with the nuke dump.

Traditional Owners' rights denied

Friends of the Earth say, "Since the passing in Australian Parliament's lower house of the National Radioactive Waste Management Amendment Bill, a Senate Inquiry continues to look into implications of this legislation that names Napandee at Kimba as the site for Australia's national nuclear waste



Location map of the proposed nuclear waste dump at Napandee, 20km west of Kimba, South Australia. Inset, left – a concept of the waste facility. Inset right – the dump location, inside the red circle. The blue dot is Fossil Fool Bulletin HQ!

Map and site graphic: Australian Government; Australia map: Apple Maps

dump and removes Traditional Owners rights to challenge that decision.

"In a cynical and undemocratic move, federal resources minister Keith Pitt announced that a new 'Australian Radioactive Waste Agency' will be established and located in Adelaide. We are calling on SA Premier Marshall to uphold SA law that prohibits a nuclear waste dump in that state."

On July 21, Pitt issued a joint media release with the Member for Grey, Rowan Ramsey MP, and the South Australian Minister for Energy and Mining, Dan van Holst Pellekaan.

"A dedicated agency will be established by the Australian Government for the management of Australia's radioactive waste that brings together responsibility and expertise in this important and specialised field.

"The Australian Radioactive Waste Agency (ARWA) will be based in Adelaide and be responsible for all functions of the National Radioactive Waste Management Facility (the Facility), including engagement with the Kimba community."

Keith Pitt said the creation of the new agency is the next important step in developing Australia's radioactive waste management storage solution and capabilities.

"The new agency will be responsible for all stages of the design, construction, licensing applications and operation of the Facility, working in close partnership with ANSTO. A single

agency ensures a dedicated focus on managing Australia's radioactive waste in accordance with domestic and international regulations and best practice," Pitt said.

Australia becomes a global nuke dump?

And speaking of international regulations, there are numerous people pushing for Australia to host an international nuclear waste dump to deal with highly dangerous spent reactor fuel and similar hazardous material – which remains life-threatening for at least 100,000 years.

It was a pet project of former South Australian Premier, Jay Weatherill, nuclear enthusiasts Alexander Downer and Martin Ferguson, and of course, BHP which operates Australia's biggest uranium mine, Olympic Dam.

The South Australians even held a Royal Commission which claimed such a dump would generate billions in profit, although a citizens jury was 70% opposed to the idea.

The Minerals Council of Australia is delighted by developments around the nuclear waste dump. CEO Tania Constable said, "The establishment of the Australian Radioactive Waste Agency in Adelaide to manage South Australia's National Radioactive Waste Management Facility is another positive step to support the development of a high-tech Australian nuclear industry, especially life-saving nuclear medicine.

Nuke waste dump

• Continued from p2

“Australia’s world-class medical research reactor at Lucas Heights produces vital nuclear medicines and procedures which will be used by one in two Australians during their lifetime, and the new facility will play an important part in developing Australia’s nuclear technology expertise.”

Constable went on to spruik the expansion of Australia’s uranium resources. She complained that Australia’s current ban on nuclear energy and technologies prohibits the development of significant new advanced nuclear industries.

Deplorable process facilitates nuclear expansion

Australia’s nuclear waste stockpile certainly needs to be well managed, but the process at Kimba has been deplorable. The creation of the dump leaves the country exposed to unwelcome expansion of the nuclear industry. There are numerous Coalition nuclear power enthusiasts such as John Barilaro and Barnaby Joyce. And ANSTO wants to grow its nuclear medical supply business to grab 30% of the global market.

Do we really want to be the world’s nuclear waste dump?

Napandee National Radioactive Waste Management Facility, Kimba – 45 jobs

- 14 security and safeguard jobs;
- 13 roles in waste operations and technicians;
- 8 roles in site management and community outreach;
- 5 jobs in environmental protection and quality control;
- 5 jobs in safety and radiation protection.

Australian Radioactive Waste Agency, Adelaide – 35 jobs

- The agency will be operational from 21 July 2020 – initially established as a separately branded function of the Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources before transitioning to a non-corporate Commonwealth entity.
- A domestic and international search for a CEO will be undertaken to ensure that the agency is led with the appropriate skills and expertise.



Fossil fools want government handouts

• Continued from p1

dom of Information Act suggest that Manufacturing Working Group members who drafted the report have not had to declare or manage conflicts of interest, despite many having links to the petrochemical, oil and gas industries.

This includes one member of the Working Group, James Fazzino, who is a director of gas pipeline company APA. According to 350.org Australia, this is particularly concerning considering the final report appears to promote higher prices for gas pipeline owners and the Narrabri gas project, where APA is proposing to build the Western Slopes Pipeline.

Narrabri gas and pipelines promoted

“It’s extremely concerning that the Narrabri gas project and gas pipelines are being promoted when there are potential conflicts of interest concerns about members of the working group who are making the recommendations.

Taxpayer subsidies and slashing environmental protection from coal seam gas and fracking projects would be a disaster for regional communities, water supplies, and the livelihoods of farmers, according to Lock the Gate.

“The coal seam gas and fracking industries are losing industries – they’re losing money, losing water, losing out on the opportunity to move to cheap clean renewable energy,” Lock the Gate Alliance National Coordinator Naomi Hogan said.

“Let’s be clear, these tired old polluting fossil fuel industries were bleeding money before Covid-19 hit. They are not a solution to the economic crisis we now face.

“If these gas projects and proposed gas pipelines had any economic merit, or stacked up environmentally, they would not be going begging for special treatment and taxpayer’s support.

“They’re using their political influence to squeeze for hand-outs to pollute your kids’ future.

“Our economy of the future could boost fire and drought resilience, and support job intensive industries of all kinds move to cleaner production and manufacturing with solar and green hydrogen.”

Major concerns about NCCC

The NCCC has been plagued by controversy since it was first announced in March. Concerns that have come to light include:

- Multiple members of the NCCC have strong links to the gas industry, including direct interests in the development of gas projects that were later named as priorities in a leaked report by the Manufacturing Working Group under the NCCC.
- Neville Power is being paid \$267,345 for his initial 6-month position, comprising his salary and expenses. Other Commissioners are receiving \$2,000 a day.
- Neville Power has stepped back from board duties at gas company Strike Energy due to perceived conflicts of interest, but he remains a board member and major shareholder.
- Andrew Liveris has not been required to declare conflicts of interest, despite being on the Board of Saudi Aramco and Worley, as he has been appointed a “special advisor” to the NCCC rather than a Commissioner.
- A number of legal and integrity organisations, and Independent MP Zali Steggal, have raised the alarm about the lack of transparency and governance standards established for the NCCC.
- Environment groups have raised concerns that the NCCC has falsely claimed to have consulted with them.



ADANI WATCH

The Bob Brown Foundation has set up Adani Watch, following the international activities and human rights transgressions of Adani. See it here:

adaniwatch-bobbrownfoundation.nationbuilder.com

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Inside the news

The **Independent Planning Commission (IPC)** has concluded an epic series of **Santos** Narrabri gasfield hearings, which are summarised on pages 8-9. The IPC hauled in **NSW planning department executives** to answer questions raised by expert witnesses, particularly concerning bushfires, climate change, water security and waste disposal.

People watching the on-line hearings have commented that NSW Planning seems in **lockstep** with Santos' submissions. They are quite happy for **unresolved** issues to be addressed after the project is approved. Shoot first and ask questions later!

Narrabri, and thousands of people who have made submissions or presentations to the IPC now wait until **September 4**, when the IPC must announce its decision.

Murdoch's Daily Telegraph continues to act like a brochure spruiking the gasfield, and whinged that outsiders such as the "Knitting Nannies" were in Narrabri during the hearings. Their journo didn't even bother to do a quick Google search which would have given him the correct name, **Knitting Nannas**. But we all know by now, **News Corp** is not a news organisation, but a propaganda agency for the **Coalition** and **fossil fools**.

The general fossil fuel news reveals many coal, oil and gas companies are in distress as **fuel prices drop** and they struggle to even sell shiploads of pollution.

Chevron is unhappy as it discovers its **\$76 billion** Gorgon gas plant in WA is riddled with huge cracks and will be unable to operate for months. The losses are relentlessly stacking up.

Despite the anti-environment and anti-science culture wars, **renewables** are surging ahead.

Which leaves an apparently rather deranged Liberal MP, **Craig Kelly**, sitting up into the early hours every night, making dozens of Facebook posts denying **climate change** and promoting **Trump's** favourite drug, hydroxy-whatever, now discredited as a treatment for **Covid-19**.

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In the news this week

This week Fossil Fool Bulletin has summarised 20,900 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/aug/03/adani-second-major-korean-brokerage-withdraws-financial-backing-for-miners-coal-projects>

Second major Korean brokerage withdraws financial backing for Adani's coal projects

Ben Smee, Guardian, 03/08/2020

A second major Korean backer of Adani's Australian coal operation has said it won't provide any more financial support for the controversial miner, which faces potential debt difficulties related to its Abbot Point export terminal.

Hanwha Securities states the firm would cease financing Adani's coal projects.

Last month, Samsung group company Samsung Securities pledged to cease its financial backing of Adani, just days after protests began to target the group's electronics branch.

It is understood the withdrawal of Hanwha Securities was hastened after the anti-Adani group, Galilee Blockade, held a protest at the Sydney office of the Hanwha Q Cells last week.

<https://www.afr.com/companies/mining/asian-lenders-shun-adani-s-abbot-point-terminal-20200803-p5514r>

Asian lenders shun Adani's Abbot Point terminal

James Fernyhough, AFR, 03/08/2020

Taiwanese lender Yuanta Securities Investment Trust has sold \$27 million worth of bonds in Adani's Abbot Point coal terminal in Queensland, joining a rapidly expanding list of Asian and global lenders that have shunned the controversial project.

Yuanta was once the second-biggest investor in one of the project's bond issuances, holding more than 5% of a \$US500 million issuance due to expire at the end of 2022.

Others that have ruled out investing in the project again include South Korean lender Samsung Securities, Valex Capital, Guardian Life Insurance, J. Safra Sarasin, FIIG and Hanwha.

Commonwealth Bank and Westpac lent the project \$170 million in 2013, with a maturity due in November 2020. However, this appears to have already been paid back, because Commonwealth Bank told the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics in July that the loan was no longer on its books.



Stop Adani has pushed another financial institution to cut all ties with Adani's Carmichael coal project! South Korean conglomerate Hanwha has ruled out providing further financing for Adani's Abbot Point coal port or any of Adani's coal projects.

Photo: Stop Adani

COAL ROCKS ON

<https://www.smh.com.au/national/new-grid-report-forcasts-rapid-transition-away-from-coal-fired-power-20200729-p55gny.html>

New grid report forecasts rapid transition away from coal-fired power

Peter Hannam, SMH, 30/07/2020

Renewable energy will supply as much as 90% of the power for Australia's main energy grid by 2035 if more than \$100 billion is spent on critical transmission lines and other investments.

That's the verdict from the latest Integrated System Plan, the 20-year road map provided every two years by the main regulator, the Australian Energy Market Operator. The plan rules out the addition of any new baseload coal-fired power plants and assumes the giant Snowy pumped hydro scheme proceeds.

The report said the National Electricity Market, which serves eastern Australia, is undergoing a rapid transition as renew-

able energy and storage costs tumble and ageing coal-fired power plants exit.

"We don't see [new] baseload coal as a competitive option," AEMO chief executive Audrey Zibelman said.

<https://www.frasercoastchronicle.com.au/news/unsafe-mine-space-sealed-for-good/4068572/>

'Unsafe' mine space sealed for good

Michael Wray, Fraser Coast Chronicle, 31/07/2020

Mining giant Anglo American will permanently seal a section of a central Queensland coal mine where a blast nearly killed five workers in May.

Investigators are still probing what caused the blast but management briefed workers yesterday on plans to resume operations at the Grosvenor mine in the second half of 2021.

Anglo American metallurgical coal business CEO Tyler Mitchelson said, "We have

made the decision to permanently seal the part of the longwall panel where the methane ignition incident occurred in May. Permanent sealing provides the greatest level of safety and will help facilitate works to prepare Grosvenor mine for a safe restart of operations, which is likely to be in the second half of 2021.”

<https://www.muswellbrookchronicle.com.au/story/6857600/validity-of-air-quality-monitoring-disputed/>

NSW Government facing potential legal action for failing to include key data about Upper Hunter air pollution to National Environment Protection Council

Matthew Kelly, Muswellbrook Chronicle, 30/07/2020

The state government faces potential legal action for failing to include key data about Upper Hunter air pollution – which is among the worst in Australia – to the National Environment Protection Council.

The omission of the data gives a significant boost to the state’s overall air quality report card.

“This is slap in the face to Upper Hunter residents because it says: ‘We don’t care about you’. People who live near power stations are already suffering an unacceptable health burden and they have a right to know the pollution levels in the air they breathe,” said Environmental Justice Australia lawyer Nick Witherow, who is advising the Hunter Environment Lobby.

Witherow said serious doubts existed about accuracy and adequacy of National Environmental Protection (Air Quality) Measure data for NSW.

“The Upper Hunter Air Monitoring Network only collects a fraction of what is required. It primarily collects PM10 (coarse particle pollution) data, rather than the full suite of pollutants required under the National Environmental Protection (air quality) measure,” he said.

“The most toxic particulates for people’s health is PM2.5. Only three of the region’s 14 monitoring stations collect data about PM2.5 (fine particles).

The president of the Hunter Environment Lobby, Jan Davis, said Upper Hunter residents had been “tricked by government obfuscation”.

“Our health is being overlooked. We need more adequate air quality monitors that measure the PM 2.5s for a true and accurate picture in real time for the health of people and the environment,” Ms Davis said.

“Added to the already overburdened air quality from open cut coal mine operations, it can be seen that our air shed is one of the most severely impacted in Australia.

“This is just not good enough.

“Thousands of people suffer with asthma-related effects, as well as the increase

in heart and lung problems we find with increased air pollution, our lives are made shorter just by living here.”

<https://www.afr.com/companies/mining/glencore-to-cut-australian-coal-production-20200802-p55shot>

Glencore to cut Australian coal production

Peter Ker, AFR, 03/08/2020

Glencore is working on plans to slash output from Australian coal mines in response to weak prices, in a move that will reinforce the Swiss miner’s reputation as the most active manager of supply and demand in global commodity markets.

Glencore is yet to finalise which of its NSW and Queensland mines will bear the brunt of the cuts but confirmed it would soon make “targeted volume reductions” in Australian coal.

The move comes after prices for top-quality thermal coal from NSW have slumped from more than \$US120 a tonne to just \$US51 a tonne over the past two years, leaving an estimated 30% of local mines in the red.

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/aug/03/more-coal-power-generation-closed-than-opened-around-the-world-this-year-research-finds>

More coal power generation closed than opened around the world this year, research finds

Adam Morton, Guardian, 03/08/2020

The size of the global coal power fleet fell for the first time on record over the first six months of the year, with more generation capacity shutting than starting operation. Global Energy Monitor, a US research and advocacy group that tracks fossil fuel development, found the closure of coal generators closing, mostly across Europe and in the US, outstripped stations being commissioned, largely in Asia.

China, the world’s biggest annual greenhouse gas emitter, continues to dominate coal power development, having built nearly two-thirds of the world’s operating plants and being home to almost 90% of generators under construction. It is home to half the world’s operating coal-fired electricity capacity.

But the monitor’s global coal plant tracker database found the amount of coal power commissioned in China to the end of June was more than 40% below the same stage last year – 19.4 gigawatts compared with 11.4GWs – because of the coronavirus pandemic.

While China continues to build coal, construction has ground to a near halt in India, which shut more capacity than it opened.

Analysis of Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change scenarios suggests coal power generation will need to fall 50% below current levels by 2030 to put the world on a path to keeping global heating

within 2C of pre-industrial levels. About 75% will need to shut over the decade to stay below 1.5C.

<https://www.smh.com.au/business/banking-and-finance/unisuper-dumps-coal-assets-as-sector-turns-its-back-on-fossil-fuels-20200803-p55hzd.html>

Unisuper dumps coal assets as sector turns its back on fossil fuels

Charlotte Grieve, SMH, 04/08/2020

Two ASX-listed coal miners have been cut off the books of major superannuation fund Unisuper in another sign of the sector turning its back on the fossil fuels industry.

Unisuper has confirmed it no longer holds stakes in coal miners New Hope and Whitehaven Coal but would not comment on whether the move was part of a wider climate policy to restrict exposure to fossil fuels. The fund has also dropped its holdings of investment firm Washington H. Soul Pattinson, which has been targeted by shareholder activists over its major stake in New Hope coal mine.

OIL & GAS LEAKS

<https://inql.com.au/business/2020/07/29/royalty-changes-fire-up-the-mining-sector-as-state-election-looms/>

Royalty changes fire up the mining sector, shape as key election issue

John McCarthy, In Queensland, 29/07/2020

Global energy giant Shell has told a parliamentary committee that the Queensland Government was dramatically changing its royalties regime after it had been given an agreement before it committed \$20 billion on its LNG project.

The Government has introduced legislation to change the method of assessing royalties in the gas and mining sectors worth more than \$4 billion a year to Treasury. Broad aspects of the legislation have been endorsed by business, but there are also concerns that it will force up costs and drive producers offshore or interstate.

The issue is also pitching the sector back into the election debate with the Queensland Resources Council backing an LNP plan to freeze coal royalties for 10 years. The Government has also yet to reach an agreement with Adani over its royalties on the controversial Carmichael coal mine in the Galilee Basin.

<https://www.msn.com/en-au/news/other/gas-prices-will-need-to-stay-low-to-compete-with-alternatives-on-renewable-grid-operator-says/ar-BB17kSZm>

Gas prices will need to stay low to compete with alternatives on renewable grid, operator says

Adam Morton, Guardian, 29/07/2020

New gas-fired power is not essential for a grid increasingly based on renewable energy, and gas prices will need to stay low if it is to compete with alternatives, according to the government agency

responsible for the electricity system. The Australian Energy Market Operator (Aemo) has released a roadmap detailing what an optimal national electricity market would look like to 2040 if it was designed with a focus on security, reliability and the lowest cost for consumers.

Its integrated system plan, the result of 18 months consultation and analysis, describes a diverse system based on large-scale renewable energy and distributed power sources such as rooftop solar panels supported by multiple “dispatchable” sources. That’s power generation that can be called on whenever needed.

Aemo says the plan focuses on what is best for consumers and could deliver \$11bn in net benefits.

The plan suggests solar panels backed by small batteries would provide between 13% and 22% of electricity by 2040. They would run alongside more than 26 gigawatts of utility-scale renewable energy – big solar and wind farms – that would be needed to replace 15-gigawatts of coal-fired generation that is scheduled to shut.

Support for these would come from between six and 19 gigawatts of dispatchable power, new systems designed to manage the more flexible grid and significant amounts of new transmission infrastructure. Renewable energy zones such as those proposed in NSW would be developed.

Gas-fired power, is described as “a potential complement to storage”, but further investment in it is considered “less likely”. “New flexible gas generators could play a greater role if gas prices remained low at \$4 to \$6 per gigajoule over the outlook period,” it says.

<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/mining-energy/lng-producers-write-off-20bn/news-story/d6c4ad5813e55a00eee36200883c0eef>

LNG producers write off \$20bn

Perry Williams, Aus, 30/07/2020

Australia’s LNG sector has blown up more than \$20bn in write-downs after French energy giant Total took a \$US800m (\$1.1bn) hit, sparking concern high construction costs and a lower oil price outlook may derail spending needed for a next wave of investment.

Total, which owns stakes in Inpex’s \$US45bn Ichthys gas plant in Darwin and Santos’s \$US18.5bn GLNG export project in Queensland, blamed “giant projects with high construction costs” and lower oil price assumptions for the impairment.

Over \$22bn has now been written off on projects run by Woodside Petroleum, Shell, Origin Energy and Oil Search so far in July as some of the nation’s biggest gas producers slash their assumptions for oil amid COVID-19 uncertainty.

Australia’s \$200bn LNG spending spree in the past decade has catapulted the country

to be the world’s largest gas exporter but most projects have suffered cost blowouts and delays, trimming returns for some of the world’s biggest energy producers and raising doubts over the appetite of majors to bankroll a next wave of projects.

“GLNG has proven one of the worst LNG projects in Australia on an economic basis, in the wake of cost overruns and more challenging rocks than initially envisaged, which has also garnered plenty of unwanted attention from government as domestic (gas) prices rose, placing jobs at risk,” Credit Suisse analyst Saul Kavonic said.

<https://www.goldcoastbulletin.com.au/news/queensland/qld-gas-royalty-scheme-not-yet-ready-to-roll-out/news-story/1510fc8c7c87462eb6b350e8b837c8cd>

Qld gas royalty scheme not yet ready to roll out

Jessica Marszalek, Courier-Mail, 03/08/2020

A new gas royalty regime promised by former treasurer Jackie Trad more than a year ago still isn’t finalised just two months before its delayed start date.

Meant to deliver cheaper power for Queenslanders, ongoing questions over the deal come amid warnings from the Queensland Resources Council that investors will sidestep the state for projects in Africa, with companies wary of Queensland’s “erratic” royalty decisions.

The government still hasn’t worked out how it will calculate gas volumes under the new model or how much the new regime will raise for the Budget.

QRC chief executive Ian Macfarlane asked for a decade-long royalty freeze “to draw a line under the upheaval” of royalty arrangements, including the out-of-the-blue decision last year to hike gas royalties by 25%.

<https://www.smh.com.au/business/the-economy/crude-reality-oil-giants-split-on-fossil-fuels-future-20200731-p55hd1.html>

Crude reality: Oil giants split on fossil fuels’ future

Nick Toscano, SMH, 01/08/2020

On a blue-sky March day, one week after the World Health Organisation declared the pandemic, a nearly 300-metre-long tanker set sail from Chevron’s Wheatstone project on the coast of Western Australia carrying a cargo of liquefied natural gas. The gas on board had been super-chilled: first to minus 130 degrees – the point at which it flashes over to a liquid – then even further to minus 162 degrees.

Like almost all tankers leaving Australia loaded with liquefied gas, this vessel, the British Mentor, would usually have been bound for a port somewhere in North Asia – Japan, China, South Korea – where its contents would be regasified, put into pipelines and sent to customers for power generation, heating and manufacturing.

Instead, it would spend the next two weeks idling at sea, either anchored in the sparkling Indian Ocean or sailing around in circles.

And finally, after finding a new buyer, it set off on a highly unusual voyage crossing the entire South Pacific to Manzanillo, Mexico, 15,000 kilometres away.

Australia’s big producers of liquefied natural gas (LNG) – the nation’s second largest commodity export – have been hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic, and the story of the stranded British Mentor is far from isolated.

On the question of what lies beyond, however, an unmistakable split in the industry is coming into focus: Once the COVID-19 smog lifts, will demand and prices for oil and gas return to pre-pandemic levels? Or will the downturn be deeper, longer-lasting, and accelerate the transition away from fossil fuels in favour of clean alternatives?

<https://www.qmeb.com.au/more-lng-trains-have-to-be-checked-for-massive-cracks-at-76b-project/>

More LNG trains have to be checked for ‘massive’ cracks at \$76B project

Richard Szarbo, Qld Mining & Energy Bulletin, 03/08/2020

An oil and gas producer could have no choice but to go back and check the remaining facility equipment for giant cracks at a US\$54 billion (A\$76B) gas development.

Chevron Australia has confirmed it is likely to be forced to reinspect pressurised propane kettles on two out of three liquefied natural gas (LNG) trains at the Gorgon Gas Project, 145km off the shore of Karratha.

The decision came after workers reported “massive” cracks, measuring up to 1 metre long and 3cm deep in between eight and 11 kettles on the second LNG train during scheduled maintenance. The proponent found substandard fabrication caused multiple breaches inside of the 15.6 million tonne per annum Gorgon LNG Processing Plant.

<https://www.theland.com.au/story/6854629/aspiring-to-net-zero-emissions/>

A raft of new policies for NSW Farmers

Annabel Johnson, NSW Farmers, The Land, 30/07/2020

The NSW Farmers’ Executive Council has formalised opposition to the Narrabri Gas Project.

The project has been a significant issue facing members over recent months, and their opposition to it is based on the general view among members that it poses unacceptable risk to water sources, soil and air quality – and thus to local food and fibre production and to rural communities in western New South Wales.

NSW Farmers is also requesting the extinguishment of the 11 expired and inactive petroleum exploration licences.

• *Annabel Johnson is NSW Farmers Head of Policy & Advocacy.*

SPECIAL: IPC SANTOS GASFIELD HEARINGS

<https://www.afr.com/companies/energy/officials-dig-in-on-santos-project-bona-fides-20200801-p55hli>

Officials dig in on Santos project bona fides

Elouise Fowler, AFR, 03/08/2020

NSW government senior officials have insisted the risks to water resources from Santos' \$3.6 billion Narrabri gas project are manageable even without full water modelling and that the extra data that opponents say is critical can be gathered after the project is developed.

The experts from the NSW planning department told the state's Independent Planning Commission on Saturday that while more data was needed to assess the full risks, the model they used to base their assessment was "fit for purpose". They said the salt waste management plan could also be assessed later.

The IPC commissioners recalled the bureaucrats to front up on Saturday afternoon for a one-and-a-half hour session on the seventh and final day of hearings to dig into some of the many concerns raised by experts, farmers and activists – in particular the project's threat to water contamination from the coal seam gas drilling, fire risk and salt waste.

Scientists and engineers warned during the marathon IPC hearings that the department had not given proper weight to the uncertainty of the modelling and that unacceptable impacts to groundwater and other aquifers remained a risk.

Dr Matthew Currell, associate professor at RMIT, warned of "high stakes consequences" if wells leaked, and said Santos had not considered the full range of data on the connections between aquifers.

How Santos would manage the 33,600 tonnes a year of salt waste from the project also remains a major issue of concern.

Commissioner Stephen O'Connor asked Kitto why the department was delaying the assessment of salt waste disposal until after the project is finally approved.

Kitto acknowledged concerns raised by UNSW's Professor Stuart Khan who said the project should not be approved without a salt waste management plan, to avoid leach from the waste – containing heavy metals and other contaminants – harming land and water.

"We agree you know, that the waste disposal is a key issue. I think we've always seen that there would be a spectrum of ways to deal with it," said Kitto.



Protesters bring the toxic salt waste problem to attention outside Santos' Narrabri office. Photo: NSWGas Ban

"Stuart Khan was saying ... that all this should be worked out prior to anything happening on site. And I guess we don't agree with that, that aspect of it. I think we know it can be managed."

Commissioners also homed in on the project's fire risk, with Commissioner Snow Barlow asking if the department considered the likelihood of increased fire risk due to climate change in its assessment report, given that the frequency and intensity of fires is likely to increase during the life of this project.

Kitto maintained the gas flares and on site works posed remote risks to igniting a bushfire, contradicting former fire chief Greg Mullins' testimony to the IPC where he branded the department's decision as "irresponsible" as gas flares and mining activities introduce "many new potential ignition sources" to the Pilliga in north-west NSW which is "becoming increasingly flammable and subject to extreme fire weather".

<https://www.cairnspost.com.au/news/national/narrabri-gas-less-than-10pc-of-project-opponents-based-in-area/news-story/9c7303862b1a1780e3e841a90b020354>

Narrabri gas: Less than 10% of project opponents based in area

Matthew Benns, Daily Telegraph, 03/08/2020

Just 34 of the 401 people addressing the Independent Planning Commission about the proposed gas field at Narrabri – most of them against the development – are actually from the town.

The anti-coal seam gas speakers include Knitting Nannies Against Gas from Lismore, Bayside Seniors from Victoria, environment groups from Dubbo and Blacktown and Greens senator Justin Field.

Narrabri Chamber of Commerce president Russell Stewart has written to local businesses urging them to speak up in spite of fears they may be the target of "attacks by the coal seam gas lobby".

• *Editor's note: Do your research Matthew Benns – a quick Google will give you the correct spelling of Knitting Nannies Against Gas.*

<https://www.northerndailyleader.com.au/story/6860653/govt-questioned-on-fire-climate-change-water-and-waste-disposal-at-narrabri/>

Planning department grilled again by independent commissioners

Daniel Pedersen, Northern Daily Leader, 03/08/2020

Bushfires, climate change, water security and waste disposal topped the list of questions commissioners had on the final day of the Independent Planning Commission's public hearing into the Narrabri Gas Project.

For seven days commissioners heard submissions from speakers who represented some of the 23,000 submissions against the project.

On Saturday afternoon a little after 3pm Department of Planning, Industry and Environment director David Kitto was called back to the commission to explain some salient points.

He was virtually flanked by DPIE executive director Mike Young and senior planner Stephen O'Donoghue.

The first question was whether climate change had been factored into the department's decision to allow the project's development. Kitto said it had, particularly in the case of bushfires.

He downplayed the likelihood of safety flares, of which there would be two – one in the Pilliga forest and another outside, being operational on days of catastrophic fire risk.

Mike Young said Santos would also be expected to ensure its own firefighting equipment would be available to help the RFS fight bushfires in the vicinity.

Commissioner Professor Snow Barlow persisted with the questioning: “We’ve heard from fire experts during the hearing that a naked flame is vulnerable to detritus being driven by high winds through the flame and willie willies lifting up bark etc in the surrounding area to create a potential ignition source.

“Has that been evaluated?” asked Prof Barlow.

Kitto said there would be firefighting capabilities on site and workers around all the time, meaning reaction to any fire starting would be rapid.

The commissioners then moved onto issues related to groundwater.

The department heard there were great concerns about farmers having to prove evidence of a loss of water and the great costs of building such a case and how this could be overcome?

On the matter of biodiversity offsets for the project, the department was asked whether it thought land required to meet conditional offsets would be available on the open market?

Prof Barlow asked about fragmentation of wildlife habitat and what fencing would be required?

On the question of fugitive emissions the department was asked about Santos’s estimate of CO2 content being about 5% and whether that was truly representative of the project, given the hearing had heard that content could be as great as 20-30%?

Senior Counsel assisting the commissioners Richard Beasley said some submissions to the hearing had suggested Australia’s domestic gas price was now tied to international prices and the Narrabri project would have no affect on domestic prices.

Asked about disposing of salt waste from the project Kitto said there was a spectrum of ways to do it.

He said re-using the salt waste as a by product would be best and disposal as landfill would be a “last resort”.

• **Editor’s note: Department of Planning, Industry and Environment speakers all generally discounted the issues raised and were clearly in favour of the gasfield development.**

<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/mining-environment/narrabri-pollution-concerns-doubted/news-story/fb3d07b25dcbf15f5b7ab677fb7f0a8c4>

Narrabri pollution concerns doubted

Perry Williams, Aus, 03/08/2020

The NSW Department of Planning has downplayed a key concern raised by opponents of Santos’s \$3.6bn Narrabri gas project, saying it failed to see how widespread contamination of the Great Artesian Basin would occur should the controversial development proceed.

Among the chief concerns raised by critics of the proposed gas facility was the potential for the basin and surrounding aquifers to be poisoned due to underground drilling, putting in danger both local farms and the region’s agricultural products produced from the land.

Asked by IPC commissioner Snow Barlow whether a “spill” could contaminate the Great Artesian Basin, a top NSW Planning bureaucrat said it struggled to see the risk of such an event occurring.

A final decision by the IPC is due by September 4.

<https://www.northerndailyleader.com.au/story/6857992/divided-town-waits-on-gas-d-day-after-decade-struggle-over-multi-billion-dollar-project/>

“Divided” town waits on gas D-Day after decade struggle over \$3.6 billion Narrabri Gas Project

Andrew Messenger, Northern Daily Leader, 03/08/2020

“My grandfather fought in the Somme and my father fought in the Pacific to defend our country and I’ve spent three times longer than any of them in war trying to defend Narrabri, and I just find that quite outrageous.”

Rohan Boehm has spent 12 years campaigning against the Narrabri Gas Project, a period longer than both world wars put together. Millions of hours “wasted” doing his best to stop a scheme which, he says, has no economic viability, environmental justification or social licence.

“The detractors would say you’re a bunch of greenies, you’re a bunch of radicals, well in fact, we’re not, we’re the conservatives.”

The project has split apart community groups, and sporting clubs, built and destroyed friendships, ruined or made businesses, said Boehm.

With the Independent Planning Commission (IPC) closing public hearings on Saturday, Narrabri is in for an anxious wait.

Gas supporter Russell Stewart, Narrabri Chamber of Commerce President, said he only took over the position six years ago because his predecessor was “bullied out” by “anti-groups” for supporting gas.

Stewart, who said a majority of the opposition to the project had come from out of town, said activists descended on the small town during the IPC process.

For years local farmers have been amongst the loudest voices against the proposed project.

Sarah Ciesiolka was among a record 401 speakers at the epic seven-day public hearings on the project. More than half of the speakers opposed the project.

She told the IPC fear of the gas scheme has stopped her expanding her \$50 million local agribusiness.

Ciesiolka said Narrabri is a community divided, even down to local clubs.

Boehm said what had been a reasonably cohesive community 13 years ago when he moved to Narrabri isn’t any longer.

But there’s no division on Narrabri Shire Council.

Mayor Catherine Redding, a very prominent supporter of the project, said the council last year voted unanimously to “recognise the economic benefits of the project.”

For the Narrabri Gas Project, D-Day is September 4. The IPC must make a decision before then.

All four of the locals the Leader spoke to for this story agreed on two things.

They all spoke very highly of the IPC staff, widely praised as extraordinarily professional.

And everyone can’t wait to see the back of the exhausting process they conducted.

If the scheme does win approval from the IPC, opponents have already vowed to take direct action to stop the development from taking place.

CLIMATE CRISIS

<https://thenewdaily.com.au/news/2020/07/31/bush-fire-levy-fossil-fuel/>

Fossil fuel industry should pay for bushfires fuelled by climate change: Report

New Daily, 31/07/2020

Bushfire victims say the fossil fuel industry should pay as they struggle to recover from Australia’s latest horrific bushfire season.

The victims are calling for a levy.

It comes as the Climate Council on Thursday released its plan, which outlines the steps needed to be taken to manage the next era of bushfires fuelled by climate change.

A levy is one of 165 recommendations outlined in the plan.

Former Fire & Rescue NSW Commissioner Greg Mullins admitted the levy would be “controversial” but said it was fair.

“Look, this will be controversial, but it came through loud and clear: Whoever creates the problem needs to pay for it,” Mullins said.

“People talked about asbestos. The fossil fuel industry has known for decades what they produce is dangerous.

“The people creating that risk will pay. There needs to be a levy on the fossil fuel industry to be a national disaster fund.

“During bad years it could supplement state and territory funding and, particular, in the recovery.”

FOSSIL POLITICS

<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/manufacturing-shake-up-to-drive-jobs-boom-covid-taskforce-20200729-p55gji.html>

Manufacturing shake-up to drive jobs boom: COVID taskforce

Nick Bonyhady & Mike Foley, SMH, 29/07/2020

Manufacturing can grow to create 495,000 new jobs in the next decade in the wake of COVID-19, a government-commissioned taskforce says, as it calls for ambitious new government policy and industry collaboration to drive sector growth.

The unreleased report, from the National Coronavirus Co-ordination Commission's manufacturing taskforce, identified areas for growth in eight industries – food manufacturing, mining technology, defence, renewable energy, healthcare and biotechnology, recycling and packaging, advance manufacturing and aerospace.

The report estimates the sector could add up to 495,000 jobs over the next decade but that forecast is underpinned by favourable policy and a forecast of very cheap gas, which some industry experts have suggested is not feasible.

The same taskforce is urging the federal government to underwrite a dramatic expansion of gas supply.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/jul/30/australian-pms-department-refuses-to-release-covid-19-commission-documents>

Australian PM's department refuses to release Covid-19 commission documents

Christopher Knaus, Guardian, 30/07/2020

The prime minister's department refused to publicly release 1,100 documents linked to the Covid-19 commission's discussion of gas projects and 690 documents about potential conflicts of interest, while also redacting its meeting minutes on economic and national security grounds.

The government has faced sustained criticism about the lack of transparency surrounding its National Covid-19 Co-ordination Commission, a body designed to guide Australia's economic recovery.

A series of freedom of information requests – including from the Guardian, environmental group 350 Australia, the Australia Institute, and journalist Hannah Ryan – have asked for documents that would likely



Neville Power (left), chairman of the National Covid-19 Coordination Commission, which is pushing for a massive government-funded gas industry expansion, with Prime Minister Scott Morrison. Photo: Joel Carrett/AAP

have revealed how potential conflicts of interest were handled by the commission.

The requests have so far either been refused on practical grounds or heavily redacted by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Richie Merzian, the Australia Institute's climate and energy director, said the institute's FOI revealed that the normal governance, processes and expertise involved in the public service were simply non-existent in the NCCC.

“This is concerning as the commission is made up of business people who are using, in the chair's own words, their ‘contact lists’ to ‘problem solve’ without being ‘managed from the centre,’” Merzian said.

He said the lack of transparency around conflicts gave the public little confidence such issues were being dealt with properly.

<https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/news/politics/2020/08/01/new-mode-covid-19-board/159620400010184>

'New mode' for Covid-19 board

Margaret Simons, Saturday Paper, 01/08/2020

The NCCC, Morrison said, had done “a fantastic job” but would now enter a “new mode” with six new directors and a sharpened focus on the government's “JobMaker” plans.

The commission has been criticised for conflicts of interest and a lack of transparency. But more seriously, there is a dearth of demonstrable outcomes.

Labor's Senator Katy Gallagher, who chairs the senate Covid-19 committee, which has had NCCC commissioners before it for questioning, says it has been “impossible to work out or understand what they are up to”.

Power and other commissioners have described a kind of national troubleshooting role in the early days of the pandemic, using their business contacts. But even this, says Gallagher, is what the NCCC says about itself, rather than what others are saying.

Questions on notice resulting from the committee hearings have not been answered by the NCCC and are now well overdue.

Journalists and other organisations have sought details about the NCCC's work, without success. The government has refused to make public 1100 documents related to the NCCC's discussion of gas projects, after they were requested under freedom of information laws, as well as nearly 700 documents related to potential conflicts of interest.

This week, the six new appointees were being tightly media-managed by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. Requests for interviews made to their organisations were referred promptly back to the department and then declined. It did emerge they had not yet met as a group, nor been briefed. Power himself has declined interview requests.

Morrison said the “new mode” would include a change of name to the National Covid-19 Commission (NCC) Advisory Board, “to more accurately reflect its strategic advisory role”.

Most news reports reflected this as moving the NCCC “inside government” with an explicit role in advising cabinet – and even less transparency as a result. But the NCCC was already part of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and has always been an advisory body to the prime minister. So, what is the substance of the change?

The most visible aspect of the NCCC's work – known only because of a leak – was the interim report of its manufacturing

working group, which included recommendations for government to underwrite a massive expansion of the domestic gas industry.

The director of climate and environment at the Australasian Centre for Corporate Responsibility, Dan Gocher, criticised the working group for being “stacked with oil and gas executives” and having made recommendations “that personally benefit them and their shareholders ... It’s brazen self-interest, cronyism and a disgrace.”

Catherine Tanna, managing director of EnergyAustralia, was one commissioner called out by Gocher for her company’s links to gas interests.

Her departure from the NCCC was announced this week along with the new appointments. Morrison seemed to suggest she was leaving because of the conflict of interest issue.

“Cath obviously has a very specific role within EnergyAustralia. And we need to manage conflicts going forward,” the prime minister said.

The NCCC already lost former Australian Council of Trade Unions secretary Greg Combet, who departed in early July, citing the end of the “crisis management phase” of the pandemic. He has since repeatedly refused requests for interviews about his experience with the NCCC. Tanna also declined to be interviewed.

Some of the new appointees have credentials in renewable energy, encouraging a view that the government agrees with the many commentators urging investment in renewables as an important part of the Covid-19 economic recovery. The department’s response to questions confirmed that “affordable and reliable energy” was a government focus – but did not use the word “renewable”.

So, who are the new appointees? Su McCluskey is chair of Energy Renaissance, which is planning to build a lithium ion battery factory in Darwin. She is already on the Ministerial Advisory Council on Skilled Migration, and the Deregulation Taskforce, and was a member of the Harper review of competition policy.

The apparent replacement for Greg Combet’s industrial expertise is Paul Howes, formerly national secretary of the Australian Workers’ Union, and now a national managing partner of multinational business services company KPMG. He is best remembered among the political class for his role in unseating Kevin Rudd as prime minister.

Samantha Hogg is a former director of the Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA) – the body established by the Gillard government to fund and drive renewable energy technologies. She is also a director of Infrastructure Australia and is best known as chief financial officer for Transurban. She is also a director of Hydro Tasmania.

Laura Berry is the chief executive of Supply Nation – the body that accredits Indigenous-owned businesses for the purposes of government procurement policies. She is already on the Ministerial Advisory Council on Free Trade Agreement Negotiations.

Mike Hirst is a retired career banker and former managing director of the Bendigo and Adelaide Bank.

Finally, the youngest new appointee is Bao Hoang, co-founder and CEO of the Roll’d chain of Vietnamese fast food franchises. His biography claims strengths in strategic planning and innovation with experience in health and hospitality.

These newcomers join existing commissioners Neville Power, former Telstra chief David Thodey, senior public servant Jane Halton and former Toll magnate Paul Little.

<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/gas-stance-defended-as-the-most-viable-here-and-now/news-story/33af9055027843b598be31ce5491c143>

Gas stance defended as the ‘most viable here and now’

Paul Garvey, Aus, 02/08/2020

Nev Power has defended the National COVID-19 Commission’s stance on energy and particularly its advocacy for gas, saying Australia is already experiencing substantial investment in renewable energy sources.

Power said the committee had identified the increased supply of affordable gas as a means of improving the competitiveness of Australia’s manufacturing industry.

While renewables had made major leaps in competitiveness as an energy source, they were not yet viable alternatives to replace gas in manufacturing products such as fertilisers and chemicals.

<https://www.gladstoneobserver.com.au/news/lnp-divided-on-funding-coal-fired-power-station-co/4067657/>

LNP divided on funding coal-fired power station construction

Leighton Smith, Gladstone Observer, 30/07/2020

In the lead up to October’s state election, the state LNP and Labor Parties have found surprising common ground in their preference to fund renewable energy projects rather than paying to build a new coal-fired power station in North Queensland.

This state LNP position runs contrary to the views of their federal counterparts including Queensland Senator Matt Canavan, Capricornia MP Michelle Landry and Flynn MP Ken O’Dowd who fought hard to secure a \$3.3 million feasibility study examining the viability of using taxpayer money to underwrite the power station’s construction.

Addressing an energy forum hosted by environmental groups last Thursday, Queensland Shadow Energy Minister

Michael Hart made clear his party’s opposition to the state government providing taxpayer funding to a 1GW High Energy Low Emissions power plant proposed for Collinsville, 250km south of Townsville.

“The LNP is not proposing for any government investment for a new coal-fired power station. Let’s just rule a line through that straight away,” Hart said.

Capricornia MP Michelle Landry said energy users in north and central Queensland needed reliable, affordable supply. “That means ensuring a reliable, balanced mix of generation in the system, which for many years to come will include coal, gas and a growing share of renewables,” Landry said.

Flynn MP Ken O’Dowd was adamant Queensland needed more power, not less.

O’Dowd believed that our energy mix should include coal, nuclear, gas and renewables.

A strong advocate for the construction of a new HELE coal-fired power station, CQ-based Queensland Senator Matt Canavan said the policies of the state LNP were a matter for them.

Natural Resources Minister Anthony Lynham has previously maintained that Queensland was already well placed for energy generation and didn’t need another coal-fired power station – especially one funded by taxpayers.

<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/more-funding-needed-in-government-push-to-cut-green-tape-industry-20200730-p55h41.html>

More funding needed in government push to cut ‘green tape’: industry

Mike Foley, SMH, 03/08/2020

Resource and agricultural industries are welcoming plans to cut “green tape” and speed up project development by handing control of some elements of national environment laws to state governments, but they say changes cannot come at the expense of wildlife protection.

Federal Environment Minister Sussan Ley announced in July plans for a “one-touch” regime that transfers to states the Commonwealth’s legal responsibilities for protecting threatened species and ecosystems in assessments of major projects that come under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.

Ley has ruled out financial support to help the states conduct extra work under a new system. But she has said states would have to show they could meet the standards required under the act, which include assessing complicated, long-term impacts of activities such as land clearing, coal mining or sinking wells for gas production, and impacts on flora, fauna and the water table.

Minerals Council of Australia chief executive Tania Constable welcomed the opportunity to speed project approvals and said the mining industry relied on a “strong



Juukan Gorge before and after Rio Tinto destroyed it. Composite: ABC

social licence” and for environmental assessments “to be done properly”.

“But the department or body that has carriage of compliance must have the right amount of resources.”

Federal administration of the act has fallen short since it was created in 1999. The list of threatened species and ecosystems has grown by a third – from 1483 to 1974. More than 8 million hectares of threatened species’ habitats have been cleared in that time, mostly for project development, but 93% of these were not assessed under the legislation.

A report last month from the Commonwealth Auditor-General found the Environment Department failed to protect endangered wildlife or manage conflicts of interest in development approvals, and 79% of approvals were non-compliant or contained errors.

<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/indigenous/indigenous-groups-set-to-win-new-rights-after-juukan-gorge-overhaul/news-story/c88a9b539ab856a20af02e84bd95f06>

Indigenous groups set to win new rights after Juukan Gorge overhaul

Paul Garvey, Aus, 03/08/2020

Aboriginal groups will have a far greater say over their land under an overhaul of

legislation that let mining giant Rio Tinto blast the ancient Juukan Gorge caves in Western Australia.

WA’s Department of Planning, Land and Heritage used its submission to the joint standing committee on northern Australia’s inquiry into the destruction of Juukan Gorge to detail a bill that is expected to replace the section 18 process that paved the way for the caves’ destruction.

WA’s Aboriginal Affairs and Land Minister Ben Wyatt had planned to overhaul the legislation well before the Juukan Gorge controversy erupted, having launched a review into it more than two years ago.

In its submission, the DPLH noted that the existing act was almost 50 years old and out of date with modern standards.

The system has been under intense scrutiny since Rio Tinto went ahead with the detonation of the two caves in May. While Rio Tinto had secured legal approval for the work in 2011, a subsequent excavation of the caves had found artefacts dating back 46,000 years and prompted an 11th-hour push by traditional owners, the PKKP Aboriginal Corporation, to halt the work.

The department flagged that a new bill to replace the existing act would make Aboriginal people responsible for evaluat-

ing the importance and significance of their heritage sites and establish an Indigenous-chaired Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Council “to provide strategic oversight” of the Aboriginal heritage system.

Current “weak” penalties for breaches of the act will be overhauled, while a 12-month limitation period that restricts comprehensive investigations into issues will be extended to five years.

The department also confirmed that the new bill would finally give Aboriginal people a right of appeal.



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