

# Focus on SANTOS

By Focus Publications for Knitting Nannas Against Gas

## What's in this newsletter

Focus on Santos aims to help environmental campaigners with timely, accurate facts and comment.

Editor Eve Sinton is known for Fossil Fool Bulletin, published 2017-2021.

Focus on Santos will publish as required.

A Substack newsletter version is located at:

<https://evesinton.substack.com/>

– where you can **subscribe**.

Also, check Focus on Santos on Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100089607618624>

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## Santos told to look at cumulative impact of Narrabri pipeline



### North West Protection Advocacy

**The NSW Department** of Planning and Environment has rejected a bid by Santos to avoid cumulative impact assessment of its planned Narrabri Lateral Pipeline. In its [Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements](#) ("SEARs") issued on 9th February 2023, the Department called on Santos to consider "the potential cumulative impacts due to other developments in the vicinity (completed, underway or proposed)". This is despite Santos claiming in its Scoping Report for the 60km gas pipeline that there would be no cumulative impacts in relation to atmospheric emissions (deliberate or accidental), biodiversity and bushfire risk, with other industrial projects in the Pilliga Forest.

### Pilliga targeted for industry

Nearby industrial projects include:

- Narrabri Underground Coal Mine, currently underway and approved for Stage 3 expansion – a decision of the NSW Independent Planning Commission facing judicial review in the NSW Land and Environment Court, challenged for "unreasonableness" by the Bushfire Survivors for Climate Action Inc.

- Two large exploration leases called Gorman North which were issued to Whitehaven Coal in 2022
- [Narrabri Gas Project](#) – 850 gas wells approved, many in the Pilliga, and some in surrounding farmland which would connect with pipeline;
- The Queensland [Hunter Gas Pipeline](#), which would connect with the Narrabri Lateral at Baan Baa;
- The Inland Rail which is currently aligned directly with the Australian Wildlife Conservancy land.

The hastily issued SEARs document has not been specific about the methodology to be used but the [Cumulative Impact Assessment Guidelines for State Significant Projects](#), published in October 2022, provide the methodology for projects where there is “potential for material cumulative impacts as a result of other relevant future projects”. The above listed projects are all related within the meaning of the cumulative impact guidelines as they are either physically connected or located in contiguous extractive or exploration tenures, and are extracting from essentially [the same coal seams](#) with demonstrated aquifer connectivity issues.

### **Biodiversity, atmospheric emissions, bushfires**

Not that a pipeline would have aquifer connectivity. Cumulative impact concerns relating to the 50-55cm diameter pipeline are primarily about biodiversity, atmospheric emissions both deliberate and accidental and bushfire risk.

NWPA [was recently critical of Santos' Scoping Paper](#) for the Narrabri Lateral over half of whose length is within The Pilliga, habitat for nationally listed species such as the swift parrot, koala, nail-tailed wallaby, wombat, Pilliga mouse, eastern pygmy possum, swamp and red-necked wallaby, barking owl, squirrel glider, and the south-eastern long-eared bat amongst dozens of others.

Preservation of The Pilliga, NSW's largest inland temperate forest, is now partially in the hands of the Commonwealth Minister for the Environment Tanya Plibersek whose portfolio includes the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act). Before stepping back from its intention in the Scoping Report, Santos public relations personnel informed community at an information day at Baan Baa that the Narrabri Lateral would be referred to the Commonwealth as a “controlled action” which could impact negatively on Matters of National Environmental Significance.

The NSW Government's Biodiversity, Conservation and Science Directorate provides advice, politely suggesting:

“If the proposed development is likely to be a ‘Controlled Action’ under the EPBC Act, the accredited assessor should contact the BCS North West Planning team at [rog.nw@environment.nsw.gov.au](mailto:rog.nw@environment.nsw.gov.au) prior to submission of the EIS. The BCS North West Planning team can provide guidance on the minimum information requirements for the EIS for any entities that have been or are likely to be deemed a ‘Controlled Action’.”

There is one problem with this advice.

Under the DPE's Rapid Assessment Framework introduced in 2022, an assessor accredited under the Registered Environmental Assessment Practitioner (REAP) scheme does not have to be engaged at the beginning of the environmental impact assessment process. This is a large and unfortunate gap in procedural oversight and scientific judgement available to guide the assessment.

### **Lack of scientific rigour**

Lack of scientific rigour was obvious in the pipeline's Scoping Report, which was just signed “Santos” with no sign-off from any named expert or person responsible. Whoever is chosen as the REAP register assessor for the Narrabri Lateral Pipeline will have many eyes scrutinising their professional judgment.

<https://nwprotectionadvocacy.com/dpe-rejects-santos-bid-to-limit-pipeline-assessment-but-more-scrutiny-needed/>

### **• See story online here:**

<https://evesinton.substack.com/p/santos-told-to-consider-cumulative>

# Santos in the news 18-24 February, 2023

## Company gets to drill 116 more wells in Qld, WA platforms declared dangerous amid safety incidents

**The news of** Santos winning approval for another 116 gaswells in Queensland broke late in the week, attracting a lot of media coverage.

Meanwhile, Santos' fifth major danger event off the coast of Western Australia was revealed. It came close to killing three workers.

As usual, Santos didn't make any public response to the event, but did crow when it got the Towrie gas development approved.

Giles Parkinson, writing in *Renew Economy*, noted: "Santos this week announced record multi-billion profits, and nearly doubled its dividend because its costs haven't changed, but the gas industry has been able to screw its customers on prices. It even had the gall to [rail against the "reasonable pricing"](#) measures introduced by governments to protect consumers."

**Focus on Santos has summarised 12 news stories comprising 6,105 words for your convenience. There's a link to the full story at the end of each item.**

**A print version of each edition of Focus on Santos can be found at <http://knitting-nannas.com/>.**

### Sydney-based Independent MPs Kylea Tink and Dr Sophie Scamps to meet with Liverpool Plains landholders amid seismic testing, pipeline concerns

*Anna Falkenmire, Nth Daily Leader, 18/02/2023*

City voices are set to join the chorus of farmers on the Liverpool Plains crying out about projects they fear could be catastrophic to the agricultural "jewel".

Independent federal MPs Kylea Tink, from North Sydney, and Dr Sophie Scamps, from Mackellar, will travel to the region next week [to hear firsthand from landholders](#).

Ms Tink said she'll come with an open, 'you tell me' mindset, but the focus is expected to be on [seismic testing for coal seam gas](#) on the Liverpool Plains, [the potential impacts of the Hunter Gas](#)

[Pipeline](#), and the Narrabri gas project.

Ms Tink told the *Leader* she was born and raised in Coonabarabran and the plight of regional NSW was important to her.

Ms Tink will meet with locals, including former New England MP Tony Windsor, during the visit.

She was elected on a platform of no new coal or gas projects.

The MPs will also visit the [Pilliga area as part of their tour of the Narrabri gas](#) project.

<https://www.northerndailyleader.com.au/story/8089212/standing-with-them-city-voices-join-chorus-crying-out-to-protect-food-bowl/>

### Gunnedah's Pip Murray announced as Upper House candidate with Elizabeth Farrelly Independents in NSW election

*Tess Kelly, Nth Daily Leader, 21/02/2023*

PIP Murray has had enough of regional voices being overlooked at the decision making table. (Paywalled.)

[Newly announced independent candidate for the NSW Upper House and president of the Dorothea Mackellar Memorial Society Pip Murray [credits gasfield encroachment on the Liverpool Plains](#) as one of the main reasons she is throwing her hat in the ring.]

<https://www.northerndailyleader.com.au/story/8092425/farmer-fed-up-with-vested-interests-puts-hand-up-for-public-office/>

### Danger Island: Santos' fifth safety incident off WA coast revealed

*Peter Milne, WA Today, 21/02/2023*

Just days after a gas leak forced the closure of a Santos platform off the West Australian coast, the state's safety regulator found 10 other platforms around Varanus Island were in a state of dangerous disrepair.

The discovery in November is the fifth time in less than two years that regulators have stepped in after a

serious incident at the oil and gas company's operations off the Pilbara coast.

Inspectors from state safety regulator WorkSafe spent two days combing reports at Santos' Perth office and found ample evidence that the Adelaide-based company had identified problems on 10 platforms but done little to fix them.

Workers can no longer safely access the platforms due to "high criticality" corrosion on ladders, decking, handrails and on the facilities for tying a boat up.

The inspectors looked at a sample of 25 maintenance work orders and found only three had been completed.

Santos' annual inspections revealed multiple problems on each platform and WorkSafe concluded access could be difficult in case of an emergency.

Santos' own plan to keep the platforms safe said structural weaknesses "may result in injuries/fatalities to personnel visiting the platform".

Worksafe concluded Santos was not fixing problems soon enough or maintaining its facilities "to a level fit for intended purpose."

The cascade of problems began in mid-2021 when two workers had to scramble for their lives when the disused Sinbad platform, being lifted by a crane on a ship, swung out of control just above their heads. The incident only became public after a startling video was leaked to the media.

A hose filling an oil tanker failed in March 2022 causing a 25,000-litre spill [where at least three dead dolphins were found floating shortly afterwards](#).

An unnamed whistleblower in a statement tabled in the senate last week accused Santos of lying when it claimed the incident did not affect the dolphins.

Then in just one month – November 2022 – an astonishing three safety concerns arose around Varanus Island.

Federal offshore safety regulator NOPSEMA, which covers waters further from the coast, ordered a rig contracted by Santos to stop drilling the Spartan field as a device called a blowout preventer that stops the uncontrolled release of oil or gas was "unfit for service".

The failure of a blowout preventer contributed to the massive Gulf of Mexico 2010 oil spill that claimed 11 lives of workers on a drilling rig.

Ten days after Santos was told to stop drilling, bubbles of gas escaping from a leaking pipeline were spotted on the ocean surface near an offshore platform that supplies most of the gas processed at Varanus Island. For two months, [gas supply in WA was restricted causing some industry to curtail production](#) while some power generators switch to more expensive diesel.

Santos did not respond to questions.

<https://www.watoday.com.au/business/companies/danger-island-santos-fifth-safety-incident-off-wa-coast-revealed-20230220-p5clwx.html>

### Santos' 'clean' fuel claims challenged in court

*Jack Gramenz, New Daily, 21/02/2023*

The Australasian Centre for Corporate Responsibility (ACCR) has sued Santos in the Federal Court alleging the oil and gas producer engaged in misleading or deceptive conduct violating consumer law.

Santos revealed plans to use carbon capture and storage to lower emissions and make "clean" hydrogen using natural gas, which the ACCR alleges was not practically or commercially viable.

The ACCR alleges Santos' representations that natural gas is a "clean" fuel and hydrogen made using it amounts to "zero emissions" were likely to mislead.

The ACCR is being represented by the Environmental Defenders Office.

Justice Michael Lee has tried to expedite the process by requesting reports in evidence rather than having expert witnesses brought before the court.

Santos attempted to present evidence in response to emissions claims related to a carbon capture and storage project criticised by the ACCR.

"It's conceivable a Santos witness will say they misunderstand the document," Santos' lawyer told the court.

"Why is it a productive use of the court's time to have to listen to evidence about that for days and days and days?" Justice Lee said.

He said a referee could conduct inquiries in the months before trial.

"(It would) be a lot cheaper and quicker for everyone."

He told the parties to confer and resolve agreed facts

of the case so the court can focus on what is in dispute.

“I want two barristers to sit down in a room with a registrar and put together this document, and stay in that room ... until that document is complete,” Justice Lee said.

<https://thenewdaily.com.au/news/national/2023/02/21/santos-clean-fuel-claims-challenged-court/>

## Burn, baby, burn

*Crikey Worm, 22/02/2023*

Federal Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek has quietly approved a Santos gas project which will operate until 2077, when the earth will be a fiery ball of molten lava because we keep approving fossil fuel projects even though the International Energy Agency says [it's the biggest thing](#) we need to stop doing. Plibersek's tick of approval was posted online at 4.55pm yesterday.

The Australia Institute's Roderick Campbell happened to notice it while browsing the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act's notices, as [Michael West Media](#) tells it.

The fracking project is in the Surat Basin, south-west of Gladstone, and public comments back in 2021 listed threatened species and impact on water resources as two major concerns.

The Greens are livid. Leader Adam Bandt [pointed out](#) it was approved without a media release or public statement and said Santos has donated half a million dollars to the Labor Party since 2015.

Kooyong MP Monique Ryan said Santos' project was “an excellent return on their investment” considering its donations.

So why did this happen? A government spokesperson told [Guardian Australia](#) the project, which is a small expansion of an existing one, had met “strict environmental approval conditions”.

Santos was clicking its heels in glee.

A spokesperson told the paper it would spend “more than a billion dollars this year alone” drilling new wells. Not to deliver us energy, however – it's for contracts with Korea and Malaysia, it qualified. Oh.

Meanwhile, expect a summer of bushfires, former

commissioner of Fire and Rescue NSW Greg Mullins told the [SMH](#) (\$). The “compounding factor of climate change” means grassfires will turn into “something we've never really seen before”.

<http://crikey.com.au/>

## ‘Making the climate crisis worse’: Greens blast Labor after Queensland coal seam gas expansion approved

*Adam Morton & Josh Butler, Guardian, 22/02/2023*

The Greens have accused Labor of “making the climate crisis worse” and being more interested in opening new coal and gas mines than working together to improve climate policy after the government approved a new coal seam gas expansion in [Queensland](#).

Documents posted on the environment department website show that the environment minister, [Tanya Plibersek](#), on Friday approved a project by the oil and gas company Santos to open 116 new coal seam gas wells in Queensland's Surat Basin.

The approval under national environment law, signed off by an official on Plibersek's behalf, allows the company to construct and operate the wells at the Towrie gas development to feed a liquefied natural gas export facility at Gladstone. It says the wells can have an operational life of about 30 years and the approval is valid until 2077.

Santos already has a large coal seam gas operation in the Surat Basin, with more than 8,000 wells approved since 2010 connected to its GLNG export development. The company said it welcomed the government's decision. A spokesperson said it would spend “more than a billion dollars this year alone” drilling new wells and developing infrastructure to supply long-term contracts in Korea and Malaysia.

Rod Campbell, research director at the Australia Institute, said while the latest development was not massive compared with others, the decision illustrated that major fossil fuel projects were often approved and expanded through a series of small decisions that added up to a significant impact.

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/feb/21/making-climate-crisis-worse-greens-blast-labor-after-queensland-coal-seam-gas-expansion-approved>

## **Tanya Plibersek gives Santos gas expansion project green light**

*Jess Malcolm & Geoff Chambers, The Australian, 21/02/2023*

The Greens say Labor's environmental credentials are "in tatters" after Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek gave the green light for a new gas expansion project in Queensland, amid deteriorating negotiations over Labor's key climate policy.

<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/politics/tanya-plibersek-gives-santos-gas-expansion-project-green-light/news-story/4a1b015eff04f63df15ab47c145a8548>

## **Santos wins approval for 116 coal seam gas wells in western Queensland**

*Marty Silk, The New Daily, 21/02/2023*

Santos has quietly been granted federal environmental approval to drill 116 new coal seam gas wells in Queensland.

Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek's department on Friday gave the green light for fossil fuel producer Towrie's project in the Arcadia Valley, about 500 kilometres north-west of Brisbane.

Environmental group Lock the Gate Alliance said the Santos project was at odds with international efforts to halt fossil fuel expansion, to keep global temperature rises within 2 degrees Celsius of pre-industrial levels.

Lock the Gate national co-ordinator Ellen Roberts also said it would lead to the industrialisation of the picturesque Arcadia Valley and risk contaminating groundwater used by local farmers.

<https://thenewdaily.com.au/finance/finance-news/2023/02/21/santos-approval-coal-seam-gas-wells-western-queensland/>

## **Santos' wins fracking approval for Towrie gas development from Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek**

*Callum Foote, Michael West Media, 21/02/2023*

Roderick Campbell, The Australia Institute's (TIA) research director, just so happened to be taking a look at the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act's notices website late yesterday afternoon, when he saw the announcement that the Federal Minister for the Environment and Water had issued Santos a 54-year approval to develop a 116-well

coal seam gas project in Queensland's Surat Basin.

While almost everyone was in the dark, someone has clearly been interested in the project, filing an FOI request showing the federal Department of Agriculture, water and the environment's July 2021 assessment of the project.

The assessment details significant environmental concerns by the department:

The department considers that the proposed action is likely to have significant impacts on listed threatened species and communities and water resources"

It was recommended that the project be subject to environmental assessment before approval by the minister.

While the environmental assessment opened the project up to public submissions, Plibersek has appeared to let Santos change the wording of their assessment after submissions were closed. According to Campbell:

What I noticed was that they've let Santos change the wording from just vertical wells to just wells.

For people who are interested in ground water quality, vertical drilling is less of a problem from a disturbance perspective. However "after public submissions had closed, the department was happy for them to change it from we're drilling vertical wells to we're drilling wells and we might do a whole lot of horizontal drillings as well," said Campbell.

<https://michaelwest.com.au/santos-wins-fracking-approval-for-towrie-gas-development-from-environment-minister-tanya-plibersek/>

## **Teal independents join farmers in Liverpool Plains to oppose Santos gas development**

*Gabrielle Chan, Guardian, 23/02/2023*

City-based teal independents have crossed the great dividing range to support Pilliga and Liverpool Plains farmers and traditional owners fighting a Santos coal seam gas project and the [accompanying Hunter gas pipeline](#).

North Sydney MP Kylea Tink, who grew up in Coonabarabran on the edge of the Pilliga, returned to NSW's north-western slopes on Wednesday with fellow independent Sophie Scamps to hear the concerns on local landholders.

They were invited by the former federal independent Tony Windsor, who has a farm in Werris Creek on the Liverpool Plains.

Traditional Kamilaroi descendent Mitchum Neave, who is chairman of Red Chief Local Aboriginal Land Council, said governments were overruling First Nations people on the Narrabri gas project.

“How can governments justify the overruling of traditional people?” he said. “Not just us. We have all these farmers as well who don’t want [the project]. Government departments, environmental departments and government planning departments need to be held accountable.

“We are leaving our great-grandchildren a mess for a handful of dollars today.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/feb/23/teal-independents-join-farmers-in-liverpool-plaints-to-oppose-santos-gas-development>

### **Extinction Rebellion activists appear in court over Tour Down Under protest**

*Lincoln Rothball, ABC, 23/02/2023*

Three activists who allegedly exposed themselves during a protest at the Tour Down Under say they intend to plead not guilty to charges of indecent behaviour.

The women, aged between 69 and 74, were protesting against Santos’ sponsorship of the race, as part of climate activist group Extinction Rebellion.

Speaking outside Christies Beach Magistrates Court, Margaret Merrilees said she and her co-accused, Beatrix Molanus-Winkel and Jayne Jennifer, would plead not guilty.

"We're charged with indecent behaviour," she said. "We know who is behaving indecently and it's not us.

"We need to do this. We need to stop gas and oil right now."

Extinction Rebellion staged a series of protests during last month's Tour Down Under, calling for the oil and gas producer to be dropped as a major sponsor.

The case has been adjourned until April.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-02-23/three-women-from-extinction-rebellion-in-court/102014192>

### **Liverpool Plains festival unites against Santos tomorrow**

*R K Crosby, New England Times, 24/02/2023*

A community festival being held at the Spring Ridge Country Club tomorrow aims to bring the community together in opposition to Santos’ gas plans.

While forcing Santos off the Liverpool Plains is the festival’s primary focus, event organiser and Liverpool Plains farmer Nicky Chirlian said there was a larger goal.

“If we stop Santos building new gasfields on the Liverpool Plains, and we stop Santos building its Hunter Gas Pipeline, then the business case for the company’s Narrabri Gas Project in the Pilliga Forest becomes much harder for it to justify to its investors,” she said.

National Farmers Federation President Fiona Simson and Assistant Secretary of Unions NSW Vanessa Seagrove will also speak at the event, along with Gamilaraay leaders and impacted landowners.

<https://www.netimes.com.au/2023/02/24/liverpool-plaints-festival-unites-against-santos-tomorrow/>

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