

Blue Mountains Conservation Society Inc



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Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow

Ms Susan Templeman, MP
Federal Member for Macquarie
susan.templeman.mp@aph.gov.au

9 August 2023

Dear Ms Templeman,

The Blue Mountains Conservation Society (the Society) is a community-based volunteer organisation with over 900 members. Our mission is to help protect, conserve and advocate for the natural environment of the Greater Blue Mountains. In fulfilling its mission the Society advocates for the protection of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area and to increase awareness of the natural environment in general.

The Society is writing to you to urge the Federal government to transition away from gas as soon as possible to deal with the current Climate Emergency, the cost of living crisis and the health issues gas causes in Australian households.

Last week the Victorian government made an important and sensible decision to phase out gas connections in new homes from January 2024.

In NSW, Waverley Council is leading the way by passing new planning laws that require all cooking and heating systems to be electrified in new homes from next year onwards. Waverley Council is being progressive by improving health and quality of life for their constituents whilst looking after the environment and ensuring they will reach their emission reduction targets of net-zero by 2035.

Canterbury-Bankstown Council is also in the process of approving a ban on gas fitting in new apartments in their City Masterplan, closely followed by other councils such as Parramatta and Randwick with similar plans.

The ACT passed a Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Reduction Amendment Bill in June to legislate the end of new gas network connections, prohibiting all new gas connection in residential and commercial areas. The ACT already sources all its energy from 100% renewables. By 2045, all gas connection will be ceased in line

with their net zero targets. Tasmania sourced 99.1% of their power through renewables in 2022.

States and councils are slowly transitioning; however to respond to the urgency of the climate crisis, we need the Federal government to take appropriate steps to support the States and develop updated policies and laws to stop the fossil fuel era.

The Federal government has the responsibility to do what is best for the Australian people and continuing to burn fossil fuels and opening more fossil fuel projects, including gas basins, is achieving exactly the opposite. Gas increases the cost of energy supply and aggravates our already unstable climate at a great cost to the economy and human wellbeing. The Society recognises that the Federal government is taking positive steps to deal with the climate crisis but the only responsible way forward is to stop all new fossil fuel projects. The Federal government is still in support of using gas as a transition fuel, which is incompatible with Australia's climate goals. With July being the first month on record reaching 1.5 degrees warming¹, a transition with gas is not an option that could be considered if Australia is serious about keeping their commitment to the Paris Agreement.

- The Northern Territory is in the process of opening up the Beetaloo Basin; this project could release 1.4 billion tonnes of emissions over 20 years. This is 2.5 times Australia's annual emissions.
- The Narrabri gas Project is likely going ahead in NSW. Starting with 850 gas wells being drilled into the Great Artesian Basin, Australia's most important water reservoir, these wells would release 1.5 billion tonnes of greenhouse gas over 25 years.
- In Western Australia, The Kimberley is under threat of fracking and if the Burrup Hub project goes ahead, another 6 billion tonnes of greenhouse gases will be polluting our atmosphere.
- Lake Eyre Basin is another area vulnerable to fracking licences. However, Origin surrendering its licence in Lake Eyre (and Beetaloo Basin) is a clear indication that big corporations are beginning to rethink their business models in a decarbonising world.

All these projects in the pipeline, begs the question "where will it stop and when will the government take seriously the advice of no new fossil fuel projects to achieve the Paris Agreements goals". Australia has the ambition to become a clean energy export "superpower" but this is pointless if we are also a fossil fuel export "superpower".

After the disastrous bushfires of 2019-2020, more than 60 per cent of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area was affected by the bushfires. Heavy rains followed and our landscape is now scarred with hundreds of landslides. The Blue Mountains and Hawkesbury residents have suffered from bushfire damage and extreme flooding in the last four years with a very high cost to people's livelihood and mental health. We are in the midst of a climate crisis, our council area is located within the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage area and it is the responsibility of the Federal government to protect and conserve the natural heritage for future generations.

¹ <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/08/08/world/july-climate-record-paris-agreement/index.html>

The extreme heat at the moment in the Northern Hemisphere has caused thousands of bushfires all over Europe, Canada the US and this is a stark reminder of the consequences of burning fossil fuels. With three years of La Niña weather in Australia ending, we are now facing a hot and dry summer and we have been warned another extreme fire season may hit Australia. Action is needed today, not tomorrow.

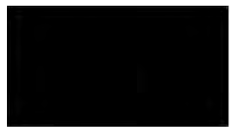
There is growing evidence that burning gas in your home releases poisonous gases, which can cause adverse health conditions². Burning gas creates carbon dioxide and gas stoves can potentially leak gas whilst turned off, releasing methane into the atmosphere. Methane is a potent greenhouse gas which has a warming effect 80 times more potent than carbon dioxide. It's bad for your health, it's bad for the environment and it's bad for your wallet.

With gas being phased out by Victoria and the ACT, it is crucial that the Federal government gets on board to achieve their net zero targets and make necessary policies to assist a fast transition away from gas, both for domestic use and as an export product. Phasing out gas and new gas projects is the only safe way forward; the government must listen to the science and the stark warning from the UN that we are starting a period of "Global Boiling" instead of "Global Warming".


With the increase of gas prices around the world, it is more efficient and cheaper for households to electrify their cooking and heating fittings, the Federal government can follow the lead of the States, Territory and councils by moving forward into a better future with new laws and policies to start the transition away from gas.

The Society is asking the Federal Government to impose a moratorium on expansion and approval of all new gas and coal projects to tackle the Climate Crisis to protect our natural landscape, our fauna and flora and to improve the health of communities.

Yours sincerely,



Annette Cam

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² https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/jun/20/gas-stoves-benzene-levels-study?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other