



Media release:

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Environmental, research and policy groups sound alarm on announcement about Santos' Barossa gas field

The Jubilee Australia Research Centre, the Australia Institute, and the Environment Centre NT have sounded the alarm about Santos' announcement that a final investment decision has been made on its high risk and dirty Barossa project.

The Barossa project is located in pristine marine waters 100km north of the Tiwi Islands, which are wholly owned by Traditional Owners under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (Cth)*. The marine environment where the project will be located, and the Tiwi Islands themselves, are areas of global biodiversity significance. The pipeline which will connect the project to the mainland will come within 6km of the Tiwi Islands, and will pass through the Oceanic Shoals Marine Park.

The greenhouse gas emissions from this project are likely to significantly increase Australia's emissions profile. It could be amongst the most polluting LNG projects in the world.

Jubilee, the Australia Institute and ECNT believe that risks to livelihoods and globally significant biodiversity, together with significant carbon emissions to be generated by the project, mean the Barossa project should not proceed.

"The Barossa project and its infrastructure are located in some of the most pristine waters in Australia. Santos' pipeline will cut through the Oceanic Shoals Marine Park and pass mere kilometres from the Tiwi Islands themselves", said Jason Fowler, a marine scientist engaged by ECNT with respect to the Barossa project.

"This project will have devastating impacts on biodiversity in the region, including on critical habitat for the threatened Flatback and Olive Ridley turtles", said Mr Fowler. "It could also cause two of Australia's most important tropical fisheries to lose access to important fishing grounds, and come under increased risk of seismic testing impacting fish stocks."

Mr Fowler concluded, "it's not clear what consultation has occurred with Tiwi people about this project, or with the wider Northern Territory community. Santos' public engagement about this project, including risks, has fallen far short of best practice. Territorians don't support gas, and there is no way this project has a social licence to proceed."

'We have seen projects like this approved without a proper process of Free Prior and Informed Consent of indigenous people all around the Pacific region—but it's alarming to see this type of thing happening in Australia as well,' said Luke Fletcher, Executive Director of the Jubilee Australia Research Centre.

'The company has to demonstrate that FPIC has occurred before making a final decision—we have serious doubts that this has happened, especially given the serious social and environmental concerns about the project' said Dr Fletcher.

The Australia Institute's Richie Merzian, said, "This could be one of the dirtiest gasfields in Australia, leading to immense harm to the environment in the immediate vicinity, and accelerating dangerous climate change. There are real questions about Australia's ability to deliver on its commitments on the Paris Agreement if this project is approved. Projects like this simply shouldn't be approved in Australia due to their high climate risks."

Richie added, “the economic benefits and jobs figures put out by the Northern Territory Government and Santos about this project don’t bear close scrutiny. The oil and gas industry pays a small amount of tax overall, and oil and gas extraction is highly capital intensive. It uses a lot of machinery, but employs very few people. Territorians know this well from their experience with Inpex, and shouldn’t put up with it again.”

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The Environment Centre NT (ECNT)

The Environment Centre NT (ECNT) is the peak community sector environment organisation in the Northern Territory (Australia), raising awareness amongst community, government, business and industry about environmental issues. We assist people to reduce their environmental impact and support community members to participate in decision making processes and action.

Website: www.ecnt.org.au/

Jubilee Australia Research Centre (JARC)

The Jubilee Australia Research Centre engages in research and advocacy to promote economic justice for communities in the Asia-Pacific region and accountability for Australian corporations and government agencies operating there.

Website: www.jubileeaustralia.org

The Australia Institute (TAI)

The Australia Institute is an independent public policy think tank based in Canberra. It is funded by donations from philanthropic trusts and individuals and commissioned research. We barrack for ideas, not political parties or candidates. Since its launch in 1994, the Institute has carried out highly influential research on a broad range of economic, social and environmental issues.

Website: www.australiainstitute.org.au