

**INQUIRY INTO PETROLEUM (ONSHORE) AMENDMENT
(CANCELLATION OF ZOMBIE PETROLEUM
EXPLORATION LICENCES) BILL 2021**

Name: Mrs Janene Theol

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PETROLEUM (ONSHORE) AMENDMENT (CANCELLATION OF ZOMBIE PETROLEUM EXPLORATION LICENCES) BILL 2021

I feel strongly that the above Bill needs to be supported by all members of the NSW Parliament so that zombie gas licenses are made extinct once they initial expires. I do not see the point in re-writing all that has been said in this important debate but to supply you with the opinions and word of those supporting the bill.

For example the below Facebook from the North West Alliance entry of 15th March 2021: -

Famers fighting zombie gas licenses fear Barilaro comments mean renewal a done deal.

POSTED BY GEORGINA WOODS [5797SC](#) ON MARCH 15, 2021

NSW Deputy Premier John Barilaro's comments suggesting the government will extinguish some but not all zombie petroleum licenses are leaving regional and rural constituents in the dark and farming districts at risk.

In response to questions about what should be done with the more than 55,000 square kilometers of expired but not extinguished petroleum tenements in north west NSW, Mr. Barilaro recently [told media](#), *"When I do release the gas strategy, and hopefully not too far off, I'm going to use that at the same time to extinguish a number of PELS across the state. I believe a number of those are not economically or environmentally viable."*

Mullaley farmer Margaret Fleck, whose property is covered by one of the zombie licenses, said the comments raised more questions at a time when the public needed answers.

"Landholders shouldn't have to live in fear that they might be unlucky enough to live on a petroleum license that is brought back from the dead," she said.

"These kinds of comments by Mr. Barilaro create second class citizens - those he is willing to protect from the scourge of coal seam gas, and those he is willing to sacrifice.

"We want to know what talks Mr. Barilaro, and his department have been in with Santos about these licenses, and we'd like an assurance that landholders will have equal access."

Both NSW Agricultural Minister and Member for Northern Tablelands Adam Marshall and Member for Tamworth Kevin Anderson [have previously publicly opposed the renewal of zombie licenses](#).

Mr. Marshall has also [told media](#) that given the approval of the Narrabri gas field, there was now no need for the zombie petroleum licenses to be brought back to life.

"There's no prospect of them being utilized anyway, because Narrabri will provide more than enough gas for everyone for ever and ever... so let's just get rid of them, remove the uncertainty and allow people to get on with their lives."

Lock the Gate Alliance NSW spokesperson Georgina Woods said she feared a party-room deal had been done without input from locals who would be impacted by the decision.

"So far the NSW Government's Future of Gas policy, expected to be released in the coming months, has included no public consultation," she said.

"Yet Mr. Barilaro appears to be able to confidently say some but not all licenses will be extinguished.

"The people affected by these licenses deserve a voice and a say, not just Santos.

“These licenses should be scrapped, and the region reserved for sustainable development that does not put our land, water, and climate at further risk.”

Or the Sydney Morning Herald article dated 27 April 2021: -

‘Hanging over the heads of communities’: Government under pressure to remove ‘zombie’ licenses

By [Peter Hannam](#)

April 27, 2021 — 1.18pm

Pressure is mounting on the Berejiklian government to make good on its promise to extinguish fossil fuel extraction rights on the rich farmlands of the Liverpool Plains with two bills set to go before the NSW upper house.

Deputy Premier John Barilaro last week told farmers at Breeza, south of Gunnedah, that the government would follow up its \$100 million buyout of plans for an open-cut coal mine by China’s Shenhua Corporation with purchases of petroleum exploration licences (PELs) held by Santos.



Andrew Pursehouse, a farmer on the Liverpool Plains, says the recent buyout of Shenhua’s coal mining licence should be extended to coal seam gas exploration licences for the region. *CREDIT: DEAN SEWELL*

Independent MP Justin Field said he would bring forward debate on legislation introduced last year that would extinguish not only the two main PELs held by Santos over the Liverpool Plains but also 10 others that have expired in a region stretching from Scone in the Upper Hunter to the Queensland border.

A second bill, being prepared by Greens MP Cate Faehrmann, would ban all coal and gas mining and exploration in the Liverpool Plains, include the Vickery coal mine extension projects.

The focus on mining's expansion into farm regions is also likely to feature in the Upper Hunter byelection to be held on May 22, triggered by last month's resignation of disgraced Nationals MP Michael Johnsen. Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party candidate Sue Gilroy is among those calling for the extinguishing of the so-called Zombie PELs that have become inactive.

Or the ABC Landline article on 14 March 2021:

Dormant gas exploration licences emerge as next frontier in New South Wales gas battle

[Landline](#)/By [Jake Lapham](#)

Posted Sunday 14 March 2021 at 9:59am, updated Sunday 14 March 2021 at 10:00am



A dormant gas license covers this cattle farm in Bunnan.

About a decade ago, a coal seam gas company went door knocking in the New South Wales Upper Hunter.

Key points:

- The approval of the Narrabri Gas project has energised gas companies
- Twelve dormant gas licenses cover 55,000 square kilometres in north-west NSW, and have renewal applications pending
- The state government's Future of Gas statement is expected in the coming months

What happened next would drive a wedge through Anne Bishop's family.

A close relative signed a contract with the gas company to allow exploratory drilling on their farm near Bunnan.

Ms Bishop, who lives on a neighbouring block, vehemently opposed gas.

"Well of course, it's a betrayal and it didn't do anything that was good for family relationships," she said.

"It was appalling."

Most of the wells have since been decommissioned but community tension over gas still simmers.

Now, it threatens to bubble to the surface once again.

Energised by the approval of the Narrabri Gas Project, and the federal government's so-called gas fired recovery from COVID-19, companies have zeroed in on other potential gas fields in New South Wales.



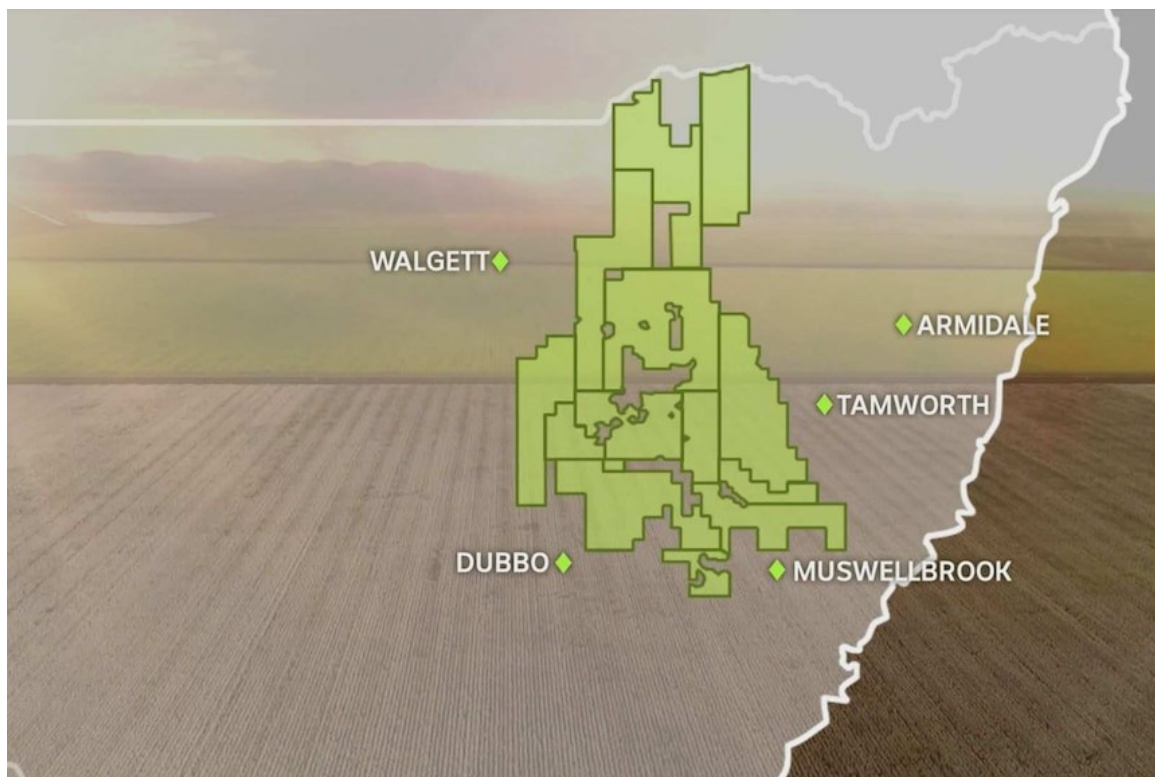
Ms Bishop's relationship with her relative has "lost of a lot of its warmth".

'Narrabri is just the first horse to bolt'

Lecturer in energy law at the University of Sydney, Madeline Taylor, said the policy environment at both state and federal levels was favourable to gas projects.

"Narrabri just is really the first horse to bolt and it represents the beginnings of a re-invigoration of the gas industry in New South Wales," Dr Taylor said.

Twelve dormant petroleum exploration licences, or PELS, are shaping as the next frontier for gas.



The licenses cover 55,000 square kilometres of land from the Hunter, up through New England to the Queensland border.

They give the companies who hold them the right to survey for gas.

But after the New South Wales government froze new applications in 2011, they have gradually expired.

All 12 licence holders have applied to renew their titles.

Among them is Comet Ridge, who announced to the ASX shortly after Narrabri was approved, that it "anticipates a return to exploration and appraisal" on two the permits it holds near Moree.



Gas exploration has been an issue in some communities for over a decade.

The state government is expected to decide on the applications in the coming months, coinciding with the announcement of a new gas strategy.

The policy is shaping as a pivotal juncture for the future of gas in New South Wales.

Water concerns

The announcement will be nervously watched by David and Paula Stevenson.

They run a cattle farm on the outskirts of Bunnan, which is covered by PEL 456.

Santos and Hunter gas have exploration rights over the area extending from Scone in the east, to Coolah in the west.

David Stevenson viewed the possibility of coal seam gas contaminating their underground water supply, as an existential threat.

"Our problem is that if these aquifers are interfered with in any way, poisoned, contaminated in any way at all, then there is no water for the stock, that is the end of our business," he said.



Mr Stevenson has farmed on his property for 30 years.

They want the state government to intervene and extinguish the dormant licences.

"There's absolutely no need for them, there's no need for this angst that is present, there's no need for these threats that exist of people sort of taking over your land and ruining it," Mr Stevsenson said.

Employment opportunities

Steve Eather farms further north near Narrabri.

He said investment had been flowing into the town since the Narrabri Gas Project was approved, and urged other regions to consider the benefits coal seam gas could bring.

"I think the benefits that will show up as they have in Narrabri, with increased employment availability, infrastructure increasing in the towns so that the local people can have confidence that their children will be employed locally," he said.



Mr Eather's believes while the Narrabri community is divided over gas, there are a lot of quiet supporters

Mr Eather did not share David and Paula Stevenson's concerns about groundwater contamination.

"I feel the protocols that have been put in place by the Government on Santos have been strong, and I'm sure that company will follow the decisions, otherwise, they will cancel their licence," he said.

'Not economically or environmentally viable'

Deputy Premier John Barilaro is tight-lipped on what may be in his Future of Gas policy.

But he has foreshadowed taking action on a number of the dormant PELs.

"When I do release the gas strategy, and hopefully not too far off, I'm going to use that at the same time to extinguish a number of PELs across the state," he said.

"I have no question about that.

"I believe a number of those are not economically or environmentally viable."



PEL 456 covers large parts of the Hunter Valley

Law lecturer Dr Taylor said even if some of the PELs were extinguished, it was merely a band-aid solution.

"Strengthening land use safeguards for agricultural land and agricultural land protection zones is a much more effective, long-term solution to ensuring that our prime agricultural land is not encroached upon by exploration and production of gas," Dr Taylor said.

"What is needed is a readjustment of the policy and regulatory settings to empower farmers to protect our agricultural land."

Posted 14 March 2021, updated 14 March 2021

To me as a resident of NSW I feel strongly that this Bill needs to be supported and amended to make expired licenses made extinct on the date they expire. I hope you will consider this submission and vote in the most appropriate manner to bring the extinction of licenses into reality.