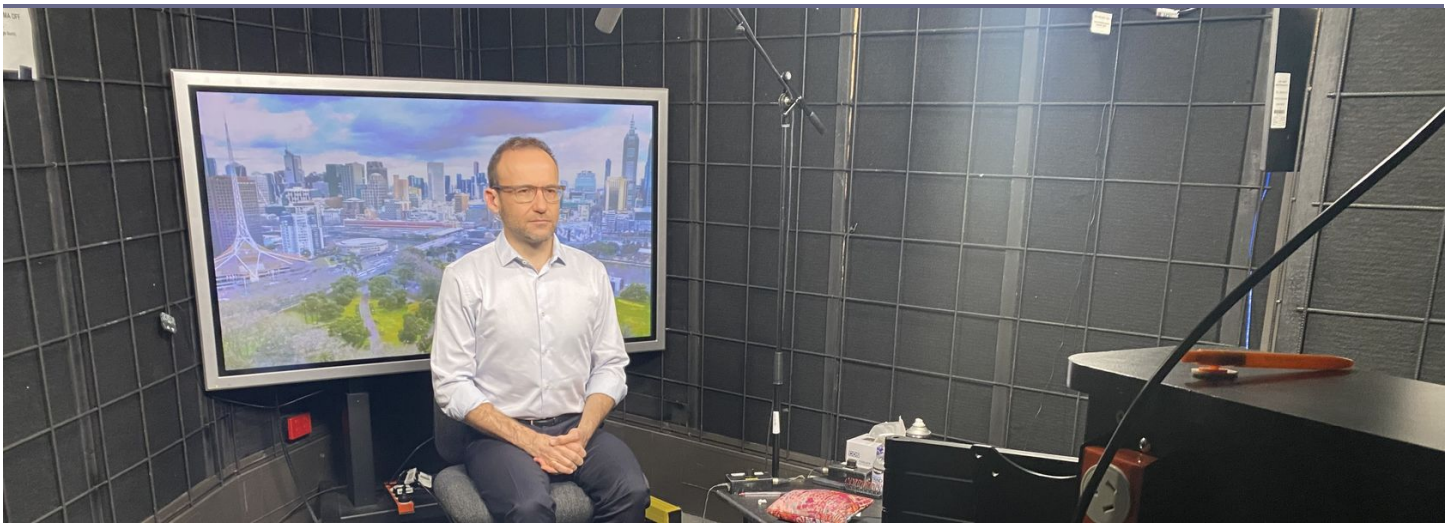
energy news bulletin

Beetaloo disinformation rife amid activist campaign

ACTIVISTS and political figures opposing development of the Beetaloo Sub-Basin have ramped up their campaign using dubious figures which have been dubbed misleading and a threat to investment and energy security by leading industry and government officials.



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Over recent weeks, activists have claimed development of the Beetaloo would push total national carbon emissions up by 13% based on current levels. This is untrue, according to industry and government inquiries.

This is not an entirely new claim. A study by a Griffith University professor from 2019 commissioned by anti-fraccing group Lock the Gate made the claims. Emeritus professor **Ian Lowe** suggested this based on production modelling of 11 trillion cubic feet of gas annum, which is what the US' vast Marcellus shale produces. The Marcellus is considered geologically analogous.

According to the scientific Pepper Inquiry into fraccing, a major development in the Beetaloo could push emissions up 5% but stressed technological advancements such as carbon capture and storage and efficiencies across operations would play a significant role in reducing this.

The origin of the 13% figure relies on highly inflated upstream production assumptions, produced by The Australia Institute in a report penned by associate professor Hugh Saddler. The Australia Institute is well known for its opposition to the gas industry. A copy of the report, and the methodology behind the figure is not readily available. Requests for a copy of the report by *Energy News* went unanswered.

The 11Tcf/a figure is close to double Australia's output. In 2020 national gas production was around 6 Tcf.

Of the gas currently produced across the nation, 74% is exported to lucrative international markets, such as Japan, with the remaining 26% designated for domestic consumption.

Greens party leader Adam Bandt flourished the 13% figure in press releases and on live television, without sourcing where the statistic came from or even noting that development of the Beetaloo was some way off, given all operators in the region are still in exploration and appraisal phases.

A large-scale development of the Beetaloo would produce 10% of the prospective resource, according to Geoscience Australia.

The prospective resource of the basin is approximately 275,000 petajoules, or roughly 250 Tcf. Divide that by 10 and over its lifetime it would produce around 25Tcf over a 30-year lifespan. Less than 1Tcf per annum.

Bandt's figure would require 23 Ichthys-sized facilities, at an investment cost of $851 billion, according to Tamboran Resources CEO **Joel Riddle** who provided comments to *Energy News* last month.

The emissions' calculation of 13% also does not incorporate declining fields across the east coast, nor the legacy North West Shelf fields of the west.

In 2017 the Gippsland Basin's decline took out 24% of local gas supply for Victoria and New South Wales. This was subsequently replaced with coal seam gas produced onshore Queensland and piped to the southern states.

However, if gas output from eastern states continues to decline - even at 1% or 2% per annum - Beetaloo gas could potentially replace this, once projects are in production. This would require a tie-in with the North-East gas connector owned by Jemena, and has been one of the leading arguments for Beetaloo development by industry.

Another point to note is the lower carbon emission intensity of Beetaloo reservoirs.

For instance, Santos' offshore Barossa project in the Timor Sea contains approximately 20% carbon dioxide. The gas samples from Beetaloo exploration projects show CO2 content between just 1% and 3%%, making it one of the cleanest forms of methane gas in the country, although Woodside Energy's Scarborough project contains around 0.1% CO2.

Santos, however, maintains it will use the Bayu Undan field's depleted reservoirs to store the greenhouse gas given venting such a high amount would these days be cause for scandal.

Furthermore, the main explorers in the region - Empire Energy, Santos, Origin Energy, Tamboran Resources, and Falcon Oil & Gas - have all said they are looking at opportunities to both offset and mitigate the CO2 from the reservoirs.

When questioned about the emissions profile of the Beetaloo Sub-Basin, Australian Petroleum Production Exploration Association director Cassandra Schmidt told *Energy News* that misinformation was the "biggest threat" to a final investment decision on developing the gas fields.

"The 2018 independent Pepper Inquiry, which found hydraulic fracturing could be conducted safely, said emissions would increase between 4.5% to 6.6%," Schmidt said.

"This doesn't include action to reduce emissions such as carbon capture and storage, which the industry is engaged in, and is an upper end estimate based on a very large industry being developed.

"We'll believe the independent scientific inquiry - which took 15 months, received 1,250 submissions as well as holding 151 public hearings and 52 community forums - over the erroneous claims of the Australia Institute and the Greens any day."

Schmidt's comments echo what Northern Territory deputy chief minister and resources minister Nicole Manison told Estimates last month.

Manison noted the rigorous scientific evidence in the Pepper Inquiry and warned misinformation could impede energy security and the economic benefits brought by field development.

"I think people that don't like to believe the scientific evidence, that the inquiry went through, [are] actively [and] constantly try to protest against the development of the onshore resources," Manison told Estimates.

"One thing I think people need to appreciate is that the gas industry absolutely understands its obligation when it comes to reducing emissions."

The oil and gas industry is committed to economy-wide net zero by 2050 and is one of the biggest investors in decarbonisation technology.

Australian oil and gas producers have already spent $6 billion on initiatives such as CCS in recent years.

In the NT there is already one major CCS project planned, the Darwin CCS hub, being spearheaded by industry in a collaboration with the CSIRO and government.