



9 November 2023

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Via email to: ec.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications

Re: Darwin's Middle Arm Industrial Precinct

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) Northern Territory Branch welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the development of Darwin's Middle Arm Industrial Precinct.

Thank you for the extension of time until 10 November to submit our response.

Before addressing the Terms of Reference noted below, we wish to make the following key points. We advocate that:

- The gas and petrochemical production planned for the Middle Arm Industrial Project poses serious physical health risks to the local community
- The high levels of greenhouse emissions from this development is a retrograde step in combating climate change, and is likely to cause harm to physical and mental health [1]
- First Nations people must have their voices heard about offshore fossil fuel projects impacting them and their Country.

Our position is informed by RANZCP's [Position statement 106: The mental health impacts of climate change](#), as well as [Position statement 68: Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Australian Constitution](#), and [Ethical Guideline 11: Principles & guidelines for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health](#).

We make specific comments in relation to Terms of Reference (c) and (e).

(c) Any climate, environmental, health or cultural heritage impacts as a result of developing the harbour and the industries seeking to establish themselves at Middle Arm

According to the Northern Territory Government's business case for Middle Arm, gas processing is likely to involve fracking of the Beetaloo Basin and opening-up of the Santos



Barossa gas development, mining activities that are likely to result in increased emissions of greenhouse gases and other harmful pollutants.

Dr Michael Petroni, an expert commissioned to provide an independent assessment on the health impacts of the project on the Darwin area, notes that the proposed facilities:

- May increase industrial fine particulate emissions by 513% in the region, resulting in \$75 million in additional health impacts, the equivalent to 15 additional premature deaths per year
- Are likely to drive up greenhouse gas emissions in the Territory by 75%, leveling an annual social cost of \$310 million
- May cause a 705% annual increase in carbon monoxide emissions
- May increase the industrial cancer hazard in the region four-fold due to releases of formaldehyde, acetaldehyde, polycyclic aromatic compounds, and additional air toxins
- May lead to an increase in the rate of serious illness, such as cancer, among vulnerable groups, such as First Nations people, from exposure to petrochemical emissions. [2]

The RANZCP Northern Territory Branch cautions that the types of gas and petrochemical production planned for the Middle Arm Industrial Project pose serious health risks to the local community.

The Branch supports the National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority (NOPSEMA) order that an evaluation should be carried out of environmental risks before construction starts on the proposed Barossa gas pipeline route. The Branch cautions that the proposed Middle Arm Industrial Project would see Australia's climate emissions increase significantly, jeopardising Australia's ability to meet its Paris Agreement commitments (to reduce emissions by 43 per cent by 2030, and to net zero emissions by 2050).

(e) engagement and advocacy by industries and their representatives throughout the Middle Arm proposal, including with First Nations groups and communities and adherence to the principles of free, prior and informed consent

Larrakia and Tiwi First Nations spokespeople have publicly expressed strong concern that the Middle Arm development will harm cultural artefacts, including the only Larrakia rock art to have survived colonisation. Middle Arm contains sacred sites and archaeological features including shell middens, and Murujuga is home to more than a million petroglyphs. [3] The Nurrdalindi Aboriginal Corporation, representing Traditional Owners from the Beetaloo Basin region, has echoed these concerns. [4]

Traditional Owners appear clear that consultation has been insufficient, and that their concerns for their Country and cultural and environmental heritage have not been heard. It is critically important that companies and governments involved in this Project conduct genuine consultation with First Nations people to ensure their concerns are properly considered and to minimise any possible harm, physical and/or psychological, from the development of this Project.



The RANZCP Northern Territory Branch is strongly opposed to any regulations that compromise the rights of First Nations people to have their voices heard about offshore fossil fuel projects that impact them and their Country.

It further submits that free, prior and informed consent of the First Nations people must be given and impacts to cultural heritage properly assessed.

If you would like further information on the points raised above, please contact Ms Nada Martinovic, Policy and Advocacy Advisor, at nada.martinovic@ranzcp.org.

Yours sincerely

Dr David Chapman
Chair, RANZCP Northern Territory Branch Committee

References

1. Prime Minister of Australia. Media Release: Stronger Action on Climate Change. 16 June 2022. Available from: <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/stronger-action-climate-change>
2. Michael D. Petroni, PhD. Expert Opinions Related to Potential Environmental and Human Health Impacts of the Middle Arm Sustainable Development Precinct as well as the Adequacy of the Draft Terms of Reference for Strategic Assessment. 9 June 2022. Available from: https://assets.nationbuilder.com/ecnt/pages/652/attachments/original/1660190794/MASD_P_Expert_Report_Michael_Petroni_%28003%29.pdf?1660190794.
3. The Top End Carbon Bomb: 'Another Juukan Gorge': Darwin's Middle Arm hub threatens Indigenous rock art, traditional owners say. *The Guardian*. 12 May 2023. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/may/11/another-juukan-gorge-darwins-middle-arm-hub-threatens-indigenous-rock-art-traditional-owners-say>
4. Larrakia speak out against Middle Arm Gas Hub: Beetaloo Basin Traditional Owners stand in solidarity [press release]. Nurrdalinja Aboriginal Corporation 12 May 2023.