



Opening Statement  
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As the peak body on climate change and health in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific CAHA is acutely aware of the ways in which the climate crisis and environmental degradation is intrinsically linked to negative health outcomes. **We are in a climate crisis and the Northern Territory is particularly vulnerable.** Climate change directly impacts human health and increases both demand for health services and the stress on the people and institutions providing those services. As such, it is crucial that all development proposals adopt a precautionary, 'health in all policies' approach, to fully assess health and climate impacts.

The Middle Arm Industrial Precinct (MAIP) proposal is a source of significant concern for Australia's health community, including the 120 health organisations that form our membership. Health is the biggest employer in the Northern Territory and has a clear stake in the current and future health and wellbeing of all Territorians. **The risks of progressing projects supported by unconventional gas represent a health crisis.**

### **Gas causes harm to health**

Gas processing and the petrochemical manufacturing that is proposed at the site significantly risk health and wellbeing of local populations due to exposure to pollutants, and global populations due to methane impacts on climate change. We have the benefit of robust health evidence from across the world to apply the precautionary principle to this development. By mid-2022, more than 2000 peer reviewed papers had examined health concerns about gas processing and the impact on surrounding populations.

Haswell and colleagues show a large number of studies have now reported health effects among children and adults living in close proximity to oil and gas operations that may result from both chemical exposures and chronic stress. The studies cover symptoms and markers of disease, higher hospitalisation rates among adults for heart disease, asthma exacerbations and hospitalisations among children to increased deaths and reduce life expectancy from cardiovascular, respiratory disease and some cancers. These impacts are more prevalent in vulnerable communities. In the Territory, 70% of health system users are First Nations.

Local health risks are already emerging from the two existing gas plants at Middle Arm, INPEX and Santos. The INPEX project emitted 11,000 tonnes of carcinogenic Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) in 2022, over 20 times the estimate given in its Environmental Impact Statement. Santos's acid gas removal unit also exceeded compliant levels on multiple occasions in 2022/23.



How can another gas facility proceed with strong health evidence to suggest it could have significantly more impact given it will rely on 'fracking' processes in the Beetaloo Basin? The health evidence must take into account the whole life cycle of industrial processes.

It was deeply concerning to learn that the Northern Territory EPA enabled gas facilities to continue venting when acid gas incinerators were not in operation. It is evident that there have been many opportunities for harmful chemicals to move from the industrial sites to the surrounding environment through air and water.

There is a myriad of VOCs likely emitted from existing facilities that are currently not measured in Darwin. It is concerning that the known carcinogenic benzene is the only hazardous air pollutant being measured from just three sites in Darwin and Palmerston.

Concerns about particulates were raised and documented by Dr Petroni, a study we support. Particulates can get into human bloodstreams and can exacerbate health risks like cardiovascular disease or respiratory ailments. We also have grave concerns about endocrine disrupting chemicals (EDCs) that can interfere with hormones and potentially alter the folding of DNA causing life-long health and developmental problems.

The Middle Arm Industrial Precinct, if pursued as currently proposed will subject Territorians to the [negative health outcomes undeniably linked to invasive fracking and fossil fuel developments](#). Evidence clearly shows that oil and gas developments are directly, and indirectly, detrimental to human health and wellbeing. They put [local communities at increased risk of vulnerability](#) and strain on already overburdened health systems. Disruptions to Garramilla Country occupied for the Project will also have significant impacts on individual and [cultural wellbeing](#) for many current and future generations.

**We cannot afford the cost to human health and wellbeing.**

**A rigorous, independent health assessment is needed** to capture the physical, social, emotional and spiritual impacts of proposed projects. This independent review needs to be shared prior to approvals with communities and in particular all Traditional Owners to inform free, prior and informed consent.