

AMSANT Opening Statement to the Senate Environment and Communications References Committee Inquiry into the Middle Arm Industrial Precinct

AMSANT (Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance of the Northern Territory) is the peak body in the NT for Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHSs). ACCHSs provide about two thirds of the health services to the Aboriginal population in the NT, which is more than any other health service type.

We are presenting at this Public Hearing because we and our member services see the urgent need to improve the health of Aboriginal people in the NT. Communities across the NT experience the effects of climate change, especially as temperatures [frequently reach 35 degrees Celsius](#) across the NT and where severe weather events like cyclones become more intense. In the first three months of 2024, cyclones and floods battered the mid-north region of the NT three times, and communities had to shelter or evacuate again and again. The ACCHS staff in these regions stayed to coordinate and provide medical care. ACCHSs in the NT are already facing severe workforce crisis to the point that some clinics have had to stop providing 24/7 care – what happens when climate-related severe weather events become even more frequent? For the health and safety of our member services and their clients, we do not support activities that accelerate climate change, including the opening of new gas projects and the use of public money to subsidise these projects. In 2021 AMSANT [opposed](#) fracking of the Beetaloo Basin as well as the Commonwealth's \$50 million handout to gas industry conducting the fracking. We do not believe that the Beetaloo fracking project is viable without Middle Arm gas precinct, nor that the precinct is viable without the Commonwealth's \$1.5 billion handout; as such we do not support the development of the Middle Arm gas precinct or the Commonwealth handout.

There is a health equity argument in stopping further gas developments. The NT's Aboriginal population make up [26%](#) of the total population, higher than any other jurisdiction. [Darwin and Palmerston](#) have a substantial Aboriginal population although the majority of Aboriginal people live in remote or very remote communities. The [burden of diseases](#) such as asthma, chronic lung disease and heart disease are already much higher among Aboriginal people than in the general population – a gas hub in Darwin will only increase this burden for Aboriginal communities living in Darwin. Overseas evidence shows that the negative health impacts from gas projects are not reversed after implementing regulations to minimise harm. To close the health gap, we need to stop the causes of ill health at the root – in this case, we need to stop new fossil fuel projects by not supporting development of the Middle Arm Precinct. We urge the government to keep to their Close the Gap commitments in making their decision.

There are many ways to improve the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people in the NT with a redirected investment of \$1.5 billion. AMSANT supports the work of Environment Centre NT, whose [report](#) recommends investment into climate resilient housing in remote communities. Resourcing to alleviate severe remote and urban workforce shortages, and investing in improving social determinants like education, employment across a range of areas and adult literacy, would also be extremely worthwhile.

We thank the Committee for their taking our evidence into account in making your recommendations.