

Larissa - Middle Arm inquiry hearings

OPENING STATEMENT

My name is Larissa Baldwin, and I'm a proud Widjabul Wia-Bal woman, and the CEO of GetUp.

GetUp welcomes the opportunity to speak in front of the inquiry today.

We are proud to back in Traditional Owners who've been fighting to protect water, cultural heritage, and Country from fracking for a decade.

After years of trying to hide behind the myth of sustainability we now know that this project is here to prop up fracking in the Beetaloo.

Middle Arm is where fracking corporation Tamboran wants to process and export their fracked gas — so public money for the Middle Arm hub is a subsidiary for fracking in the Beetaloo Basin.

Yesterday you heard from Larakkia and Beetaloo Traditional Owners that there is no consent for the middle arm project and there is no consent for fracking in the Territory.

I know that you will hear from others who will come before this Committee that there is no issue. That the Traditional Owners have consented to these projects, and that enough has been done to protect the land and the culture of its people. They will point to regulations they say they have followed, and meetings they claim to have had. And they will say that is enough.

Well it is not enough. Consent is not something that can be broken up, or completed in part. The ramifications of this project are so huge- it can only take place if there has been clear consent from all of the people affected.

There is no consent for this project

- no process of informed consent;
- no scientific explanation;
- no translators provided; and
- no information about the long-term impact and risks to water tables, livelihood & land.

So that is why GetUp makes a number of recommendations to this Committee including,

Firstly, we're asking this inquiry to recommend that The Albanese Government must scrap billions in public money for the polluting Middle Arm gas hub. Instead they should invest in projects NT communities have called on for decades: investment in housing, better roads, education and healthcare in communities. Public money should be for public good.

Secondly, we're asking the inquiry to recommend that **The Albanese Government must also legislate strong cultural heritage protections, as promised in the last election.** Larrakia Traditional Owners warn that sacred sites are at risk at Middle Arm. They have not given consent for the gas hub to proceed.

A strong Federal Cultural Heritage Act needs to protect culture. It needs buy-in from the community and must be drafted in consultation with Traditional Owners, who must have the right to say no to projects and be able to stop projects from going ahead if new information comes to light. Corporations should have a plan to protect cultural heritage that's approved by Traditional Owners before any work starts around cultural sites. This Act needs to delegate responsibility for these consultations and decisions to the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, and it needs to ensure harsher penalties are in place for corporations who destroy cultural heritage.

Third - recommend the Government must keep their election promise to protect water from fracking with strong national water laws – promised at the last inquiry into fracking and the federal election. This means Environment Minister Plibersek must use her new powers to call in Beetaloo Basin fracking projects for rigorous independent national assessment – and reject these dangerous projects.

Furthermore, this means the Government must scrap their draft plan to devolve water trigger powers to states and territories – who cannot be trusted to stand up to the gas industry. Tamboran has a terrible track record, receiving fines for spraying toxic fracking wastewater, endangering their workers, pastoral land and Country.

The outcome of this inquiry must be

- the end of public funding for fracking and gas expansion,
- retaining and using strong national laws to protect water from fracking, and
- the creation of strong national cultural heritage protections.

And finally stopping The Middle Arm Gas Hub and all fracking in the Beetaloo Basin.

Anything less will be a failure.

I'd like to thank the Committee for giving me the time to contribute here today.