

This is the submission of David Christopher Alton of [REDACTED] Darwin, on the draft bill for the office of Territory Controller. Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the decision making process on this measure.

I oppose this bill and its possible passage into NT law.

The bill's purpose is ostensibly to turbo-charge Territorians' wealth and living standards. I understand the motivation. Who wants to be poor? However, the method proposed is unlikely to achieve it and even if it does the long term negative consequences are likely to cancel out or even overwhelm the benefits. I will confine my remarks to gas fracking and associated issues. I'm sure others will cover other issues.

On first reading the bill my overwhelming reaction was "this is just so twentieth century." The system of restrictions and second considerations the bill seeks to bypass in this case were introduced in the early to mid twentieth century precisely to overcome the problems (badly executed projects) arising from the prior absence of such.. And now there is in effect a proposal to return to that situation! Seriously?

Also, the bill is, in spite of words suggesting the contrary, intended to bypass democratic constraints. I'm sorry but 2 people, the Chief Minister and the Territory Co-Coordinator, wise as they may consider themselves, do not have between them sufficient expertise to sagely rule on far-reaching and complex issues. (Nor, for that matter, would any different 2 people)

Let's cut to the chase. This bill's primary purpose is to facilitate gas fracking in the NT, which the CLP government is determined to proceed with at almost any cost regardless of the consequences because of one of 2 reasons. First, they don't believe the warnings about frightening levels of global warming that are bearing down on us arising from fossil fuel burning. If that's their position could they please just say so and point to any credible evidence for their non-belief. If firm evidence is there I'll accept it but I am not aware of any and I do keep up to date on such issues. Even the fossil fuel companies have given up claiming that their activities are safe. But an empty narrative leaves a space for others to fill, so now we're asked to believe that gas is essential to achieve net zero emissions. Yes, that's right; more gas in the atmosphere now is the pathway to less in future. Go figure!

The second possibility is that the CLP simply don't care about the longer-term future ie. our childrens and grandchildren's future. They'll deny it till black is blue but Why worry about what will happen when they, the current CLP government, is not around? Short termism in politics anywhere usually outweighs the longer term.

At the risk of being repetitive (but it seems to be necessary and it is relevant) let's very briefly consider what's coming at us thanks to ramping-up fossil fuel burning in the world (and, yes, fossil fuel companies are seeking to ramp up their extraction activities eg. in oceans off Guyana, Mexico, Angola). There's still plenty down there but they know their time will end sometime. Make hay and keep those super profits rolling in while they can. (They're not lovers of paying tax either, including here, but we can't canvass everything in a short submission.)

Current NT fossil fuel emissions are the highest per person in the world and can only go higher if the Beetaloo field alone is fully exploited. The Top End has poor air quality as it is. The Middle Arm Precinct, without which the Beetaloo is apparently uneconomic, is a highly-polluting fossil

fuel project in spite of its renaming as sustainable. The city of Palmerston is very close to Middle Arm. An 85 mile stretch of abandoned fracking sites in the US state of Louisiana is now nicknamed “cancer alley.” There’s a reason for that.

Tamboran is apparently short of money. Is this the beginning of a ploy to extract more financial concessions from the Commonwealth and NT governments? Stranger things have happened. What’s the saying? Suspect that any major project will take twice as long and cost twice as much as initially claimed. Under the proposed bill just 2 people would be empowered to deal with and resist such and they may be not able to or not willing to. Better surely to have a wider range of safeguards that don’t depend on 2 people.

There is an alternative development path for the Territory that avoids the pitfalls discussed but achieves the desired result. Find that at ecnt.org.au and read “Recharging the Territory.”

Thank you for your consideration.