



## **Arid Lands Environment Centre Submission to the scrutiny committee regarding the Pipelines and Petroleum Legislation Amendment (Industry Development) Bill 2026**

### **About us:**

The Arid Lands Environment Centre (ALEC) is Central Australia's peak community environmental organisation that has been advocating for the protection of nature and growing sustainable communities in the arid lands since 1980. We are a place-based community organisation with significant knowledge and expertise about issues and priorities that affect the arid and semi-arid lands.

We welcome the chance to share our views with the scrutiny committee, however are concerned that the tight time frame means many people who are directly and indirectly affected by this bill will be unable to review it and give their feedback.

**We strongly believe that the Legislative Assembly should not pass this bill**, or, that if it does, amendments are made to strengthen environmental protections. We urge the Committee to recommend this accordingly.

### **Our concerns with the bill:**

#### **1. CCS is not a solution to the climate impacts of gas extraction**

The bill's environmental justification rests substantially on enabling CCS — piping CO<sub>2</sub> offshore for permanent storage. This is presented as a climate measure, but CCS remains commercially unproven at scale, expensive, and contested among climate scientists. The Bill essentially future-proofs gas infrastructure under a green framing, without any requirement that CCS actually deliver emissions Reductions. It also will not solve the majority of emissions from gas extraction, which will either be from its eventual burning when the gas is consumed, and from flaring and venting of methane.

#### **2. Fast tracking Beetaloo Sub-basin:**

The retention licence reforms are specifically targeted at the Beetaloo Sub-basin — one of Australia's most contested fracking projects. Environmental concerns about Beetaloo Include:

- Surface and underground water table contamination risks from hydraulic fracturing are significant particularly given The region overlies the Cambrian Limestone Aquifer, a critical water source

For communities across a large part of the NT

- Opening up this large new gas field will have significant negative impacts on our escalating climate crisis.

- First Nations custodians for the region have raised concerns about the impacts of fracking on their Country, cultural heritage and health for many years and have not had these concerns addressed.

The Bill makes it easier and cheaper to develop these reserves by allowing cross-permit cooperation, relaxing retention licence renewal requirements, and permitting licence amalgamation — all reducing barriers to production.

### **3. Environmental Safeguards Are Procedural, Not Substantive**

The compliance and inspector regime introduced in Parts 5B–5D is procedurally robust — more inspector powers, stop-work notices, compliance directions.

However, the Bill does not introduce any new substantive environmental standards. It references “good industry practice” and pipeline integrity, but the environmental floor is set by other legislation (the Petroleum (Environment) Regulations), which this Bill does not amend.

The self-incrimination abrogation in sections 58ZC and 137T is justified on environmental protection grounds, but this power primarily serves regulatory efficiency rather than environmental outcomes.

### **4. Fit and Proper Person Test — Weak Accountability**

The Bill introduces a “fit and proper person” test across multiple licences. However, the Bill explicitly states the Minister is not required to investigate whether a person meets this test — they need only consider information placed before them. This is a low bar that places the compliance burden on regulators receiving information rather than proactive vetting of industry actors.

### **5. Aboriginal Land and Country**

The Bill allows inspectors and persons complying with directions to enter Aboriginal land without an entry permit under the Aboriginal Land Act 1978. While this is framed as a regulatory necessity, it represents a meaningful override of land rights protections that deserves greater scrutiny.

The notice requirements are minimal (7days, or oral notice in emergencies), with compensation framed as a debt claim —placing the burden of recovery on landowners.

### **7. Consultation and Transparency Gaps**

The Bill expands ministerial and CEO discretion significantly — on licence conditions, fee-setting, form approval, and guideline-making. Many substantive matters are delegated to regulation, meaning they won’t face parliamentary scrutiny. The three-year limitation period for prosecutions (new section 67C) is an improvement, but the previous 6-month window was already being used by industry to avoid accountability.

### **Summary Verdict**

This Bill prioritises industry development in a high-risk environmental zone (Beetaloo Sub-basin) while using CCS and modernisation rhetoric to soften that framing. The compliance improvements are real but largely procedural. The environmental and First Nations safeguards are weak relative to the scale of industry access being enabled. From a climate perspective, facilitating new fossil gas extraction infrastructure — even with a CCS pipeline attached — runs counter to the emissions reductions required under any credible net-zero pathway.

For the above reasons, the Arid Lands Environment Centre Opposes this bill.

Kind Regards, Hannah Ekin on behalf of Arid Lands Environment Centre.