



Submission on the Environment Legislation
Amendment (Safe Air) Bill 2026

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The Darwin situation

Darwin is facing an impending public health disaster due to deteriorating air quality which is largely preventable. As a direct result of poor air pollution regulations and monitoring, over **100,000 people living in Darwin and Palmerston have been exposed to some of the most polluting and dangerous LNG plants in the world.**

Last year, it was estimated that **Inpex Ichthys LNG emitted 540 tonnes of benzene¹ which is 795 times more than the Freeport LNG plant in Texas².** Inpex Ichthys LNG is only 3 km from suburbs of Palmerston, putting thousands of people at major risk of serious health impacts. The second LNG plant, **Santos Darwin LNG has just restarted operations only 6 km from the Darwin city centre and has been plagued with start-up problems resulting in excessive flaring and venting of toxic gas³.**

Reports of pollution problems at both LNG plants have become so common over the years that the community was forced to take proactive action and set up their own air monitoring project. It is heartening to see that the NT Government is now legislating rules around air pollution with the Safe Air bill, but the Bill needs to be strengthened if the public is to be protected.

LNG facilities are stationary sources of excessive industrial air pollution due to the volatility of the production process and vast quantity of emissions⁴. The most hazardous air pollutants include Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) or air toxics, comprising many compounds that dissolve readily into the air, sink to the ground, and are dangerous to human health. Some of the most harmful VOCs include benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene, and xylene otherwise known as BTEX chemicals. BTEX chemicals are linked to multiple cancers including leukaemia, immune disease, respiratory disease including asthma, cardiovascular disease, neurological disorders, pregnancy complications, and death⁵. Benzene is a known carcinogen (causes cancer) and is particularly dangerous at low concentrations⁶. It is widely acknowledged that there is no safe level of benzene for residents, and the occupational threshold for workers varies widely across countries. Considering that many Darwin workers are also residents, it is likely that there is no safe level of benzene for the workers either.

¹ Inpex EPL228 Annual Monitoring Report 2024/5

<https://www.inpex.com.au/media/u2ufzrk/epl228-annual-environmental-monitoring-report-2024-2025-pdf.pdf>

² McDonald, J. Fact Sheet: Freeport LNG. Oilfield Witness, August 2026

<https://oilfieldwitness.org/fact-sheet-freeport-lng/>

³ ABC radio Interview Paul Vogel, NT EPA Chair, June 19th 2026.

<https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/nt-country-hour/hot-venting-santos-nt-epa/106817282>

⁴ Environmental Health Project. Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG): Health and Climate Impacts. August 2023.

<https://www.environmentalhealthproject.org/post/liquefied-natural-gas-lng-health-and-climate-impacts>

⁵ Zhou et al. Associations of ambient exposure to benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene, and xylene with daily mortality: a multi country time-series study in 757 global locations. The Lancet Planetary Health, 2025.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2542519625001846>

⁶ DCCCEW. Benzene Overview. May 2026

<https://www.dcccew.gov.au/environment/protection/npi/substances/benzene>

LNG production is the major industrial source of VOCs in the Darwin region and yet the NT EPA does not monitor VOCs despite production of LNG in Darwin harbour since 2006. The National Environment Protection (Air Toxics) Measure (NEPM) recommends monitoring of air toxics if there is a significant VOC source close to a population of people (stage 2 site)⁷. A study of BTEX levels in 2005 in the NT indicated no source of air toxics and therefore need for monitoring, but the very next year, LNG production commenced at Conoco Phillips (now Darwin LNG). According to the Air Toxics NEPM, monitoring of VOCs/BTEX should have commenced in 2006.

A lack of VOC monitoring leads to poor visibility of VOC air pollution and consequently high VOC emissions⁸. Without direct air monitoring, gas companies can avoid scrutiny and accountability for poor operating practices such as venting acid gas directly into the Darwin air shed, not using acid gas incinerators or thermal oxidisers to reduce VOC emissions, not fixing leaks, miscalculating modelled emissions and the list goes on⁹. The lack of direct VOC monitoring makes it hard to verify the accuracy of the modelled emissions data which can compound mistakes and hide the problem¹⁰. If polluting companies are not held accountable, their practices will not change.

Limitations on VOC and BTEX emissions are lacking, and with no monitoring, highly polluting facilities are putting the public and workers at risk. Monitoring air pollutants is not enough. Outdoor air can only be made safe by limiting the major sources of toxic emissions.

In the USA, the Clean Air Act has legislated limits on emissions of VOCs and hazardous air pollutants such as BTEX which forces companies to use advanced pollution control technologies to lower their emissions. In the USA, polluters must keep VOC emissions below 100 tonnes per year or hazardous pollutant emissions below 10 tonnes per year or they face tighter regulatory controls¹¹. **Inpex emitted 4,324 tonnes of VOCs last year, 40 times higher than US limits, and 541 tonnes of benzene, 50 times higher than US limits.**

Due to the lack of VOC and BTEX emissions limits from industrial sources, the LNG plants in Darwin are particularly dangerous. If there is no safe level of benzene, what is the impact of these emissions on Darwin residents? **Urgent action on industrial air pollution needs to happen. The Safe Air Bill presents an opportunity to prioritise the health and safety of Darwin and Palmerston residents.**

⁷ DCCEEW. Air Quality, Air Toxics National NEPM. July 2026.

<https://www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/protection/air-quality#air-toxics-national-nepm>

⁸ Fitzgerald, R. This LNG plant near Darwin city releases thousands of tonnes of toxic chemicals. The impacts are not being assessed. June 2024.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-06-14/inpex-ichthys-lng-plant-darwin-nt-vocs-emissions-increase/103668268>

⁹ Fitzgerald, R. NT EPA recommends stricter pollution rules for Darwin gas giants Santos and Inpex. ABC August 2026.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-08-01/nt-epa-review-pollution-controls-darwin-lng-gas-inpex-santos/106980734>

¹⁰ Robinson, T. NT EPA prosecutes gas company Inpex, for under-reporting toxic emissions. August 2026.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-08-05/nt-epa-prosecutes-gas-company-inpex/106998434>

¹¹ Lattanzio, R. Clean Air Act: A Summary of the Act and its Major Requirements. US Congress, 2022.

<https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/RL30853>

The Safe Air Bill

A) The Assembly should not pass the Safe Air Bill in its current form as it does not keep the public safe from air pollution. Given the name of the bill, public health should be prioritised in its design.

B) The Assembly should amend the Bill. The Bill does not give sufficient regard to the institution of Parliament. The Bill proposes to delegate a *discretion only* to establish an environmental monitoring scheme with all the key details of how the scheme would operate to be determined by regulations. Amendments should be designed to ensure legislated protection of public health from preventable industrial air pollution.

Recommendations for amendments:

1. Limitations must be placed on emissions of VOCs and BTEX pollutants by stationary industrial sources and these limits should be legislated.
 - Limits of 100 tons per year for VOCs, 25 tons per year for combinations of hazardous pollutants (eg BTEX) and 10 tons per year for individual hazardous pollutants such as benzene, are listed in the US Clean Air Act.
 - The US Clean Air Act could provide guidance for emissions limits of VOCs and hundreds of hazardous air pollutants.
 - 10 tons in US =
2. Hazardous pollutants such as BTEX and other VOCs should be directly measured from stack emissions, fence line areas, residential, and urban areas within the Darwin air shed. Modelled air pollution data is inadequate to protect public health.
3. Direct air monitoring of VOCs and BTEX pollutants should be gold standard for stack emissions measurements, fence line monitoring, and monitoring at the NT EPA air monitoring network. The data from direct, continuous real-time monitoring should be publicly available.
4. Polluters should be held accountable for exceedances and should pay for the harm caused to public health and the environment. Accountability measures should be strong enough to change behaviour and improve operating standards. Licencing should depend on adherence to emissions limits and the use of advanced pollution reduction technology.

C) The Bill does not give sufficient regard to the rights of individuals to breathe clean air in its current form. The Safe Air Bill needs to prioritise public health and legislate the reduction and limitation of hazardous pollutant emissions from industrial stationary sources.

Community Healthy Air Northern Territory Incorporated (CHANT)

CHANT is an incorporated community organisation formed by Darwin and Palmerston residents concerned about air pollution from industrial sources.

We have commenced an independent citizen science project to directly measure air pollutants in outdoor, urban areas around Darwin and Palmerston.

We have fundraised to purchase a solar trailer with high-quality BTEX air monitor installed, allowing measurement of BTEX pollutants (benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene, xylene) continuously. CHANT will report pollution events to the NT EPA for investigation.

Once verified, our data will be used to inform the public about the safety of the air that they breathe.

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