

Statement from Dharriwaa Elders Group Walgett to be read by Vanessa Hickey at Sydney Rally to Stop the Narrabri Gas Project 14 September 2023.

Dharriwaa Elders Group is a charitable association of Walgett Aboriginal Elders from different Aboriginal Nations who work together for the local community they live in. We are downstream of the Pilliga forest where the Ngamaay River joins the Baawan River.

We send our grateful thanks to everyone here today and all those who put their lives and assets on the line to protect Country, water and people.

While the Native Title Act gives native title groups the right to negotiate a benefit from developers like Santos, it doesn't give them a right to veto because farmers and miners made the government weaken the native title laws.

Dharriwaa Elders Group is not controlled by the Native Title Act and has always spoken against the Narrabri Gas Project FROM DAY ONE.

Because there is no Australian law recognizing local Aboriginal people's right to protect and access Country yet, we have been appealing to lawmakers to observe environmental laws. We have been asking governments to protect the Pilliga, the Namoi alluvial and artesian groundwaters and the Namoi River and its precious tributaries, from Santos Coal Seam Gas activities. **Yet every environment and water minister from both Labor and Liberal National Party have approved the Narrabri Gas project.**

We have asked Walgett Shire Council to prohibit all CSG vehicles and trucks transporting brine waste from the Narrabri Gas Project from using Walgett Shire Roads. **They didn't listen.**

Australia has made pledges in international forums to reduce carbon and methane emissions. Australia has ratified many International Conventions AND is an original signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. **Despite all this international lip service the Narrabri Gas project has been approved.**

Worst of all, the project has been approved despite the growing Climate Emergency which the Walgett community is increasingly experiencing from flooding, storms, heat, dust storms, food and water insecurity.

Instead we see our cruel governments turn the police against the public and used as a private security force for Santos – arresting our heroic protestors for exercising their right to democratic protest.

Instead we see our cruel governments give away gas resources to Santos for export while they pay little or no tax and our community suffers in continuing poverty and disadvantage, the highest rates of homelessness in NSW and despair.

Australia and NSW don't have to be like this. We could have a caring Australia that builds the wealth and wellbeing of all its citizens, that makes sure everyone has a comfortable home, enough food and safe drinking water, good education and health services. That protects the environment – our home that supports us all.

It is a choice of our governments that we don't have this now.

It is a choice of governments that our rivers are drained and polluted by the cotton industry, and why our groundwaters are drained and polluted by single-crop farmers and mining companies.

It is a choice of governments that half of the Walgett Aboriginal community regularly experiences hunger.

It is a choice that we have to buy our drinking water.

And it's not OK!!!!

Stop the madness.

Stop the greed.

Stop the crimes against the environment, water and Country and Aboriginal Nations!

Santos must be stopped.

The Narrabri Gas Project must be stopped.

It is strange for us that we are in an alliance with farmers to fight Santos and Coal Seam Gas. Perhaps this new relationship can help us with other issues eg the condition of the rivers not only affected by Santos but by irrigation upstream of Walgett.

Maybe this new relationship will help us work on other issues important to us, the local Aboriginal community, in the future when we don't have such an alignment of interests.

We send our grateful thanks to everyone here today and all those who put their lives and assets on the line to protect Country, water and people.