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East Timor NGO hits out at Santos' carbon storage plans for Barossa LNG

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By **Damon Evans**



Santos plans to store CO2 at the Bayu Undan field

East Timor-based independent think-tank La'o Hamutuk has hit out at Santos' plans to store carbon from its proposed Barossa liquefied natural gas (LNG) development at the Bayu Undan field in the Timor Sea by filing a submission to the Northern Territory (NT) Environmental Protection Authority (NTEPA).

The authority is seeking feedback regarding Santos' proposal to construct and operate the Darwin Pipeline Duplication (DPD) Project, to allow gas from the Barossa gas field in the Timor Sea, to be transported to the Darwin LNG export facility. The gas pipeline

would be about 100km in NT waters, duplicate a section of the existing Bayu-Undan pipeline, and include a shore crossing at Wickham Point in the Greater Darwin Area.

“The NTEPA should not look at the part of this project that falls within the Northern Territory in isolation, as it affects your neighbours and the global climate,” La’o Hamutuk said in its submission today.

“Gas extraction from Barossa and carbon storage at Bayu-Undan may be outside your territorial jurisdiction, but they are intrinsic elements of the proposed DPD project. Please consider effects outside the Northern Territory, some of which could endure for centuries, while you look into the local impacts of this project,” added the non-governmental organisation (NGO).

The Bayu-Undan field lies in East Timor’s territorial waters. East Timor is also known as Timor Leste. The Barossa field lies in Australian territorial waters offshore Northern Australia.

Fast-moving plans for the Santos-led carbon capture and storage (CCS) project at the Bayu Undan field offshore East Timor, that would see the nation import Australia’s waste, have previously been described as “carbon colonialism” by La’o Hamutuk.

Last year, the Timorese NGO, warned that Santos (ASX:STO), Eni (BIT:ENI), as well as Australia, were hoping to exploit an impoverished neighbour, by implementing the proposed CCS scheme, targeted to start-up in 2025. If successful, it would be one of the biggest carbon storage sites globally.

In its submission to the NTEPA today, La’o Hamutuk said that “a piecemeal approach to a project which straddles multiple jurisdictions may not adequately protect our common welfare. Overarching issues might fall outside of each authority’s localised mandate and be overlooked – there is more to this project than the pipelines currently before you.”

“Furthermore, if some regulators are less experienced or are overly influenced by corporate pressure, others, including yourselves, need to step up and exercise their responsibilities effectively,” added the think-tank.

The people of East Timor are woefully ill-equipped to assess the implications of agreeing to the proposed CCS project. “The Timorese people – including key decision makers – have limited technical, environmental, and numerical skills and experience,” La’o Hamutuk noted last year.

The Timorese government has become addicted to easy rents from the petroleum industry and the country’s regulator ANPM has been quick to start collaborating with Santos. Last September, the pair signed a memorandum of understanding covering the Bayu Undan CCS project.

However, in its submission today La' o Hamutuk said that people in ANPM and elsewhere in East Timor understand that the MOU is only the beginning of a conversation, not a decision to go ahead with the project. In fact, the MOU itself states that the Bayu-Undan joint venture and ANPM “agree to cooperate in good faith to assess the feasibility of pursuing this opportunity,” and the matters listed in the MOU involve “assessing” various items and “establishing a clear and reasonable timeline for decisions on whether to pursue this CCS project.”

La' o Hamutuk told the NTEPA that “Santos floated the idea of Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) at Bayu-Undan to enable them to develop the carbon-intensive Barossa gas field, a greenwashing strategy to confuse the public about the damage they will inflict on the global climate. CCS is not a proven technology.”

Santos' statement that “CCS is recognised as a safe, well established solution for permanent, large-scale emissions reduction and clean energy production, being the keys to economy-wide decarbonisation” may be true for oil companies such as themselves who have a vested interest, but it is far from universally recognised, and nearly all CCS projects have sequestered far less carbon than their proponents promised, said the NGO. La' o Hamutuk highlights Chevron's recent challenges with its giant Gorgon CCS project in Australia.

“Net zero is a misleading concept. Even if the CCS project at Bayu-Undan works as Santos hopes, it may not reduce the overall carbon dioxide emissions from extracting and liquefying the natural gas from Barossa, which is one of the dirtiest gas fields in the world,” added the thinktank, citing a report from IEEFA.

“Furthermore, inevitable leaks of methane from the wells, pipelines and LNG and regasification facilities, as well as the CO₂ released by burning Barossa-sourced gas elsewhere on our planet, will significantly exacerbate the risk of serious consequences of global climate change,” warned La' o Hamutuk.

In its submission, the think-tank concluded by saying “each person in Timor-Leste is responsible for about 0.5 tons of CO₂ emissions per year. Each Australian is responsible for 30 times that much, not counting the emissions where each of our fuel exports are burned. Why should Timor-Leste be saddled with the responsibility, and the risks, of Barossa's CO₂ so that Australian companies can extract and export more fossil fuels from deposits in Australia?”