

My name is Shirley Mitchell and I care about the environment in Westernport Bay.

I thank the Crib Point Inquiry and Advisory Committee and the Minister for Planning for the opportunity to make a submission to the environment assessment of the Crib Point gas import jetty and gas pipeline project. There are a variety of issues which should deem this proposal unacceptable under its current form and that I will point to in my submission but the issue that concerns me most is the impact on our internationally recognised wetlands and wildlife.

A new fossil fuel project like the gas import terminal which AGL is proposing would introduce new risks to the local community and visitors to the area. These risks include exposing people to toxic hydrocarbons which may leak from the facility and increased risk of accidental fire and explosion as noted in EES Technical Report K. The nearest homes to the import facility are about 1.5 kms away and Wooleys Beach is also close to the site. AGL have completed only preliminary quantitative risk assessments on these risks and have deemed the risk acceptable on that basis. It is not acceptable to present preliminary studies and the EES should not continue until we have an independent expert to provide final risk assessments.

Phillip Island is the second most tourism-dependent region in all of Australia. People come to see the little penguins and the migrating Humpback and Southern Right whales as well as other incredible marine and wetland wildlife. The industrialisation of Westernport Bay in the form of huge gas tankers and a Floating Storage and Regasification Unit will undermine the beauty of the area and be inconsistent with the perception that it is a pristine and protected wetland. This could impact Phillip Island as a popular tourist destination.

Recent research has shown that wetlands have the potential to capture and store large amounts of carbon for hundreds of years. Wetlands should be protected and enhanced for their role in the fight against climate change rather than being subject to potentially damaging projects like this gas import terminal proposed by AGL. In Victoria we have already bulldozed or drained most of our freshwater wetlands which has contributed to the loss of approximately 35 per cent of wetlands worldwide between 1970-2015. We cannot afford to lose any more as we face the climate crisis.

If the project is approved AGL could dump up to 468 million litres of chlorinated water into the Bay each day which could have a disastrous impact on marine wildlife. There is so much we do not know about how this cold chlorinated wastewater will affect marine life in Westernport. The impact modelling completed by AGL is not comprehensive and in some cases totally inappropriate. Furthermore, current Victorian laws prohibit the discharge of wastewater in high conservation value areas like Westernport Bay - clause 22 of the State Environment Protection Policy (Waters). AGL has so far been unsuccessful in their attempts to weaken these laws. Combining the poor impact assessments and the fact that the plan currently does not meet the legal requirements this proposal should not continue.

Millions of Australians consider climate change not to be a threat in the distant future but a dangerous reality we face right now. We are on track for several degrees Celsius of warming by the end of the century if we do not curb our emissions from

fossil fuels. The plummeting costs of renewables and energy storage has rendered fossil fuel projects not only a threat to our environment but also bad business. Corporations like AGL should be investing more in renewables and supporting consumers to move away from gas instead of investing in soon-to-be stranded assets. This proposal to build a gas import terminal is not consistent with what we need to do to create a safe climate.

Small marine organisms which make up the foundations of the ecosystem - like plankton and fish eggs - would be the most impacted by this proposal. Locally they would be unable to escape being pulled into the ship intake and being subjected to chlorine levels far above safe levels. The impact is likely to be significant with nearly half a billion litres of water being drawn into the intakes each day. This enormous quantity of colder chlorinated water would be dumped back into the Bay and disperse with the current thereby further affecting marine wildlife.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to contribute to the environment assessment of the Crib Point gas import jetty and gas pipeline project. As outlined above, the impact on our internationally recognised wetlands and wildlife would be unacceptable. There are many other viable, and more suitable, options Victoria can pursue to ensure that we meet our energy needs without exposing the precious wetlands of Westernport Bay, the unique wildlife which depend on this ecosystem, or the local community to any harm.

Sincerely,  
Shirley Mitchell