

# Teal MPs criticise CO<sub>2</sub> sea dumping bill as ‘greenwashing’ fossil fuel industry

Independent MPs Monique Ryan and Sophie Scamps say the Labor bill to allow permits for storing carbon dioxide in international waters would encourage more gas projects

*Lisa Cox and Sarah Basford Canales in the Guardian, 2 Aug 2023*

Video: <https://youtu.be/4YVujVFWxW4>

Teal independent MPs say a government bill that would allow carbon dioxide to be pumped into international waters is a “colossal attempt at greenwashing” that would facilitate new gas projects and prolong the life of the fossil fuel industry.

In a debate in the House of Representatives on Wednesday night, the member for Kooyong Monique Ryan, accused the government of [introducing the legislation](#) with “unseemly haste” to enable projects such as Santos’ Barossa offshore gas project, which proposes establishing a carbon capture and storage (CCS) facility in the depleted Bayu-Undan gas reservoir in waters off Timor-Leste.

Under the legislation, the environment minister, [Tanya Plibersek](#), would be able to grant permits to enable CO<sub>2</sub> captured during industrial processes to be exported and stored under the seabed in another country’s waters.

The legislation would also allow permits to be issued for “marine geoengineering” research that could be used to combat the climate crisis.

The government says the bill is intended to bring Australia’s laws into line with changes to an international treaty on the prevention of marine pollution, known as the London Protocol.

But independents pushing for stronger action on climate change said they were concerned it was an attempt to give social licence to fossil fuel projects that could not proceed if the world was to have any chance at limiting global heating to 1.5C.

As a recent [Guardian Australia investigation revealed](#), the Albanese government [knew it would facilitate](#) a gas industry expansion when it committed to provide public funding to the Middle Arm hub near Darwin, despite claiming otherwise. The sea dumping bill will help with that expansion.

Ryan expressed “distress and disgust” at the bill.

“The bill will be a key enabler of gas expansion, granting social licence for new and highly polluting greenwashed fossil fuel projects,” she said.

The independent MP for Mackellar, Sophie Scamps, said the bill was “a colossal attempt at greenwashing”.

“This bill enables the Barossa gas project to go ahead, when, because of the safeguard mechanism, it may not have. It is the very exception to the safeguard mechanism that Japan was seeking – by the back door,” she said.

Amendments to the safeguard mechanism passed earlier this year require developers of new gas fields to offset all carbon dioxide emissions within Australia, adding to the cost of a project.

Last month, the government said it was resisting a push by Japan for the Barossa project to be given special treatment.

Scamps moved amendments to the bill on Thursday morning, including one that proposed preventing the legislation from being used for the export or import of captured carbon from fossil fuel projects. She also proposed permits not be granted unless they are consistent with Australia's obligations under the Paris agreement and the Convention on Biological Diversity and the receiving country is also a party to the London Protocol.

The amendments were voted down by the government and the opposition. The bill passed the lower house on Thursday afternoon and will now go to the Senate for debate.

Plibersek said the bill "increases the protection of our precious oceans" and the amendments were necessary to ensure there was a comprehensive regulatory framework was in place.

"The London Protocol prevents marine pollution," she said.

"The import of carbon dioxide for CCS is currently legal and at risk of happening in an unregulated manner."

A report by the House of Representatives committee earlier this year said Australia should ratify the London protocol amendments.

The member for Wentworth, Allegra Spender, told parliament she was concerned the bill in its current form, "does not help us fight climate change – in fact, it is quite the opposite".

Zali Steggall, the MP for Warringah, said she had "significant concern this bill will be used to enable the prolonged use of fossil fuels".

The legislation is being debated in the same week the independent senator David Pocock announced he would bring a private member's bill calling for a duty of care in Australian law that would require governments to consider the impact of climate harm on young people in their decision-making. The bill will be introduced to the Senate Thursday morning.

More than 4,000 people have already signed a petition calling on the parliament to pass the legislation.

It comes amid growing opposition to the expansion of gas projects, including in the Northern Territory.

The chief minister of the Northern Territory, Natasha Fyles, used a speech at the National Press Club on Tuesday to accuse "teals [independents] and trolls" of trying to shut down the Middle Arm development over concerns it props up gas exports from the Beetaloo basin.

However there has been strong concern about these projects from within the Northern Territory, including from Larrakia people, the traditional owners of Darwin, and traditional owners in the Beetaloo basin.