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Committee Secretary
Senate Environment and Communications References Committee
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Submission to the inquiry into oil and gas exploration and production in the Beetaloo Basin

As President, I make this submission on behalf of the Australian Rainforest Conservation Society Inc. concerned about the current linked climate and biodiversity crises.

We are pleased that the Senate has, through your committee, sought public expressions regarding the Industry Research and Development (Beetaloo Cooperative Drilling Program) Instrument 2021 aimed at directing public money for oil and gas corporations.

In effect the proposal is directly related to the Federal Government's stated objective of implementing a gas-led COVID related economic recovery.

We do not support this approach and believes it is not consistent with the growing global calls for a rapid, just and equitable change to non-carbon renewable energy based economies.

We understand that the transformational change across all sectors of society will be difficult and challenging with no time to lose. Every year counts, not some time by 2050 when it will be too late.

The fundamental issue facing the Senate Committee is "Can Australia finally honour its implicit agreement as signatory to all successive versions under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change to stabilise greenhouse gases *"at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system"*.

The answer to date has been "no".

Fifty to sixty years since initial warnings (), greenhouse gas emissions globally are still increasing dangerously (Hmiel *et al.* 2020, Jackson *et al.* 2019, Sterner *et al.* 2021), and cascading tipping points are perilously close to being breached leading irreversibly towards states unrecognisable in all of human history (Lenton *et al.* 2019). At only a 1.1°C rise in average global surface temperatures climate crises are already being experienced in all countries.

Atmospheric methane (CH₄), a more potent greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide has more than doubled since the pre-industrial era and has hitherto been significantly underestimated. Fossil fuel extraction and use are among the largest anthropogenic sources of emissions

(Hmiel *et al.* 2020). Liquefied natural gas exports from Australia and the United States are surging, lowering natural gas prices in Asia and increasing global access to this fossil resource (Jackson *et al.* 2019).

We cannot continue along this path if we are to avoid dangerous climate change.

Over the past 50 or so years' efforts have failed due primarily to highly resourced, opposition of the fossil and biofuels industries and their financial backers (Mayer 2016).

At the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio all nations agreed to stabilise concentrations of greenhouse gases to ensure that they did not produce *dangerous* interference with climate. This was an aspiration we are now unlikely to meet.

The Kyoto Protocol in 1997 tried and failed for lack of an enforcement mechanism (Barrett *et al.* 2020) but it identified 2°C as the “dangerous” threshold.

The legally non-binding Copenhagen (2009) and Cancun (2010) agreements also failed for lack of an enforcement mechanism

The legally non-binding Paris Agreement (2015) arguably has also failed for the above reasons and because it relied on modelling (Integrated Assessment Models) that assumed unproven future negative emissions technologies (Carbon Capture and Storage, CCS) and falsely that biofuels are carbon neutral and therefore a renewable energy resource (Booth 2018, 2021)

The predicted and crippling, increased frequency and intensity of droughts, mega-fires, heatwaves, super storms, the faster than predicted melting of icecaps and glaciers and rising sea levels are being experienced now as reported almost daily in scientific journals and respected media outlets including the Financial Times, The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Atlantic etc. Unprecedented social activism, particularly amongst the younger generation that will suffer the consequences the most, and unparalleled numbers of concerned scientists and Nobel laureates are publicly voicing their alarm and prescription for what is required.

Unfortunately, the various IPCC reports have generated a false sense of complacency regarding timetables reliant as they have been until now on unproven, un-scalable, future carbon capture and storage (CCS) technologies and more recently the falsely based, biodiversity-destroying bioenergy solutions coupled with CCS (BECCS). That complacency has been exacerbated by additional problematic assumptions in prior IPCC reports. One key indicator relied upon in their Integrated Assessment Model, for example, has been the Social Cost of Carbon (SCC) — this is a “lagging” indicator of the likely severity of climate change. It may be the chief culprit as to why the world is hurtling towards dangerous climate change and may have already reached critical cascading tipping points (Lenton *et al.* 2019, Wagner 2021). The complaint of Nobel laureate William Nordhaus' SCC assumed in his DICE model and its various iterations is that assumed climate damage are too conservative, risks inappropriately represented, and equity considerations largely ignored (Heal 2017, Wagner 2021).

Governments are subsidising fossil fuel industries globally and in Australia . The current proposal involves \$22m of public money that could/should instead be directed to greatly and rapidly escalating the reliance on renewable sources for our energy needs.

A critical question to answer is” *Why do we continue to export raw materials when we could base a flourishing, greater employment-generating industry in Australia using our natural competitive advantage in the raw minerals underpinning a non-carbon renewable industry*”. The most comprehensive blueprint has just been published by Accenture (Future Battery Industries CRC Ltd. 2021). The Future Battery Industries CRC was established in 2019 through the CRC Program. The current report involved the largest partnership to date comprising more than 60 participants from industry, government organisations and research partners. It recognizes batteries are critical for the timely transformation of our energy system to a low-carbon footing.

The Federal Government should not continue to subsidise the fossil fuels industry and certainly not before seriously considering the implications of the FBICRC report.

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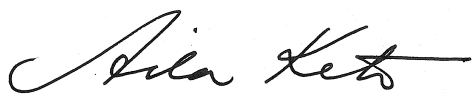
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Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Aila Keto". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

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President
Adjunct Professor, Griffith Climate Action Beacon, Griffith University

