

Gas Comms Guide

**Terminology,
Messaging &
Background Info.**

Key Messages

- Extracting and burning gas emits methane pollution, which contributes to global warming.
- Gas is a harmful fossil fuel that's driving up power prices in Australia.
- Australia is one of the world's largest gas exporters. In recent years, multinational gas companies have been making record profits while the prices for Australian consumers have been rising.
- Renewable energy, like solar and wind, is the lowest cost form of new electricity generation.
- Expanding renewable energy such as wind and solar, with storage like batteries and pumped hydro in the mix, is a better solution than adding more gas.
- There is increasing scientific evidence that the use of gas in our homes carries health risks.

Key Messages

- Cooking with gas is estimated to be responsible for up to 12 percent of the childhood asthma burden in Australia; meaning that a child living with gas cooking in the home faces a comparable risk of asthma to a child living with household cigarette smoke.
- Gas projects can pollute the environment, including rivers, groundwater and our oceans.
- The fossil fuel industry is by far the largest single source of Australia's emissions. If we continue to expand coal, gas or oil production, we are fueling more dangerous climate change.
- The International Energy Agency has stated that there can be no new coal, oil or gas projects if we are to avoid catastrophic climate change. Existing supplies of these fossil fuels are already enough to push us over 1.5 °C of warming.

Messaging advice and terminology

Refer simply to “gas”. Avoid “natural gas”:

- **Advice:** Avoid using the industry’s terminology of “natural gas” that is often confused with clean sources of energy. Instead, refer simply to “gas”, which is now more commonly used by the media in Australia, and emphasise that it is indeed a harmful fossil fuel and not a climate solution.
- Other options include the terms “fossil gas” or “methane gas”,¹ but their effectiveness hasn’t been tested and they’re rarely used by the Australian media. Some energy reporters consider their use to be sensationalist, so use them sparingly.
- “Natural gas”,² is a name that was created by the gas industry³ and spruiked over many decades including spending millions of dollars on public relations campaigns.⁴

Watch out for “Liquefied natural gas” (LNG):

- LNG is the liquified form of gas that is largely used for exports. Avoid referring to it where you can, and if you need to refer to LNG, the best way to do so is by using the acronym, rather than the full name, so you are not reinforcing the false narrative of “natural” gas..

Bogus biogas and other unproven gas alternatives (e.g. “clean gas”, “renewable gas” or “green gas”):

- Recently, there has been a big push from the gas industry to promote ‘biogas’,⁵ also known as ‘biomethane’ or ‘green gas’, as a climate solution.
- Shortcomings of biogas include:
 - .there are insufficient amounts produced;
 - its production can still involve creating significant emissions; and
 - it is being used as a smokescreen for the gas industry to delay real action on climate change.
- Terms like “clean gas” or “renewable gas” are gas industry PR and spin⁶ that generally refer to mixing very small amounts of hydrogen into normal methane gas.⁷ However, even if they used green hydrogen, made from renewable energy sources - which is often not the case - it would do very little to reduce overall emissions because there’s no evidence this mixing can be done in

large amounts. Again, it is being used as a smokescreen for the gas industry to delay real action on climate change.

- As Climate Councillor and former Executive General Manager at Origin Energy Andrew Stock said:
*“The advertising we’re seeing from the fossil gas industry with ‘renewable gas’ is a complete furphy because 90% plus of the gas is non-renewable. It still leaks and burns to produce greenhouse causing gases.”*⁸
- **Advice:** Remember to be wary of negation:⁹ when you argue against something by talking about it in your opponents’ terms, you can inadvertently reinforce it. So try not to use terms like “biogas”, “clean gas”, “renewable gas” or “green gas”, even when opposing them. Rather, refer to these broadly as “unproven gas alternatives” when arguing against them.

Refer to fracking wherever possible (avoid ‘hydraulic fracturing’):

- It is one of the most environmentally damaging ways to extract gas¹⁰ and can harm human health,¹¹ kill native animals, contaminate local land and pollute water supplies.¹²
- Even though most Australians can’t explain what fracking is, they do know it’s harmful to our environment and they think of it negatively.
- Terms: It is important to use the term “fracking” whenever the practice is occurring or proposed. Avoid the industry term “hydraulic fracturing”, which sounds too technical and benign, and most people don’t know what it is.
- **Advice:** When referring to fracking, it is important to:
 - Position scientific research into the impacts of fracking as a central focus of the debate¹³ and as a strong tool in support of anti-fracking arguments.
 - Challenge the gas industry’s claims that fracking will improve energy security in Australia, as more than 70% of our gas is exported.
 - Contest pro fracking arguments that household energy bills will be lowered - studies from CSIRO¹⁴ and the Australian Energy Market Operator¹⁵ have

repeatedly shown that renewable energy is the cheapest form of new energy generation.¹⁶

- Examine the uncertainties, such as toxic chemicals used in fracking¹⁷ and the potential health risks for people living nearby,¹⁸ or native wildlife.
- Frame the debate around climate change, in terms of emissions (particularly methane) and impacts. For example, tie groundwater pollution and depletion from fracking into a conversation about climate change and drought, particularly in farming communities.

Use seismic blasting; avoid seismic testing:

- **Advice:** Ideally always refer to “seismic blasting”, rather than “seismic testing”, as the latter implies it is benign and scientific.
- According to the Australian Marine Conservation Society, seismic blasting involves multiple air guns firing every 10 to 15 seconds, all day, every day, for weeks to months on end.¹⁹ The noise generated by seismic airguns under water reaches a massive 250 decibels – as it needs to penetrate rock.
- Evidence that seismic blasting harms marine life is growing. It can disrupt the habitats of marine animals and injure them. After seismic blasts, zooplankton (the very basis of ocean food chains) are found dead,²⁰ even as far away as 1.2 kilometres from the blast site.

Refer to gas corporations, rather than gas companies; and make it clear most are multinational to boot!:

- Messaging research has shown that the public has a more negative view of “corporations” than “companies”, and that Australians are more likely to view multinational companies more negatively than Australian companies, so refer to “multinational gas companies” or “gas corporations” wherever possible.
- Gas cartel: The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) has repeatedly raised concerns about the conduct of the East Coast Gas Market.²¹ Some energy and gas market analysts are increasingly referring to a “gas cartel” in Australia,²² “cartel-like” gas companies²³ or a “multinational gas cartel”. They do so to point out that Australia’s three LNG exporters not

only control the supply of gas on the east coast but also use this power to pursue practices²⁴ which may squash effective competition in the gas market.

- NB: However, the term “cartel” is not one that is commonly picked up by the media, and some journalists, particularly national energy reporters, consider its use to be sensationalist. As such, use it with care.

Carbon capture and storage (CCS) is an expensive failure:

- **Advice:** refer to carbon capture and storage as an expensive failure that has never worked at scale as promised for capturing harmful emissions from gas and other fossil fuels. Refer to examples of CCS failures, like Chevron’s Gorgon CCS project in WA,²⁵ the world’s biggest, which is over budget and has not captured anywhere near the predicted levels of carbon emissions.²⁶

What do Australians think of gas?

The fossil fuel industry is by far the largest source of Australia's contribution to global emissions.²⁷ We cannot avoid dangerous climate change if we continue to expand coal, gas or oil production.

The International Energy Agency has stated that there can be no new coal, oil or gas projects if we are to avoid catastrophic climate change. Existing supplies of these fossil fuels are already enough to push us over 1.5 °C of warming.²⁸

Aussies' concern about oil and gas is rising

Positively, a range of surveys, focus groups and message testing from 2020 to 2023 shows a growing increase in concern among Australians about the impacts of extracting and burning gas on climate change, the environment and human health.

For example, Climate Compass surveys delivered in 2020 and again in 2022 showed concern about the use of oil and gas has risen 7 percentage points - from 28% in 2020 to 35% in 2022.

This has been tempered somewhat in 2023²⁹ as concerns around cost of living dominate, showing the importance of continuing to explain the risks and harms to Australians.

Positively, according to the the Global Strategic Communications Council's (GSCC) "Attitudes to gas in Australia" survey in September 2023 more people believe rorting by energy companies is a cause of high bills this year than last (37% in 2023, up from 29% in 2022). The Russian invasion of Ukraine is thought to be the second most impactful issue, although this concern is decreasing (34% in 2023, down from 37% in 2022).³⁰

But, gas industry messaging is also proving effective as increasing numbers of people believe a decline in Australian gas production (24% in both 2023 and 2022) and Climate change targets and initiatives (24% in 2023, up from 19% in 2022) are having an impact as well.

There is significant confusion about gas and its role in climate change

However, the gas industry's multi-million dollar marketing and PR attempts to brand gas as "cleaner than coal", a "transition fuel" and a "low-carbon" energy source have

created widespread confusion in the community. These false narratives need to be actively countered with high quality information and messages about the harms of gas.

The GSCC's 2023 "Attitudes to gas in Australia" survey also found uncertainty over whether gas is a fossil fuel or a form of clean energy has risen substantially across the population.

Many Australians still understand that gas is a fossil fuel (43%), but that level of understanding is down from more than half of people (57%) in 2022. A significant share of Australians see gas as a clean form of energy (38% in 2023, up from 33% in 2022). Nearly a fifth said they don't know if it's a fossil fuel or clean form of energy (19%, up from 11% in 2023).³¹

However, there has been a very slight increase in the percentage of Australians that understand gas is part of the cause of climate change. 40% Australians now understand that greater production of gas is part of the problem or cause of climate change (slightly up from 38% in 2022). Alarmingly, almost a third of Australians (27%) still think using gas is one of the possible solutions to climate change (down from 30% in 2022). A fifth of Australians (20%) said they don't know (down from 22% in 2022).³²

There are still high levels of support for more gas

The same GSCC "Attitudes to gas in Australia" survey in 2022 showed that a majority of Australians (59%) were in favour of "increasing the use of gas for Australia's energy generation".³³

This was in line with the findings of the Lowy Institute Climate Poll in May 2021, which found that 58% of Australians supported increasing the use of gas for domestic energy generation.³⁴

This was somewhat contradicted by The Australia Institute's Climate of the Nation poll in September 2023, which found that more than half (55% in 2023, down slightly from 57% in 2022) of Australians support stopping new coal, oil and gas projects, in line with the International Energy Agency pathway. Support for the government stopping the approvals of new gas, coal and oil projects is particularly strong among young people, with 74% of Australians aged between 18 and 24 agreeing.³⁵

In addition, the poll found that 56% of Australians know that opening new coal, gas and oil projects will make it harder for Australia to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 43% by 2030.³⁶

This discrepancy could be because of the inclusion of much more unpopular coal and oil in the The Australia Institute poll, while the GSCC and Lowy Institute survey focussed on gas, which all the research showed is less popular than gas in general.

Gas most popular fossil fuel, but renewable energy still well ahead

The GSCC survey in 2023 found that gas is still the most popular fossil fuel, with 31% Australians still thinking of gas positively (well down from 41% in 2022), although renewable energy sources are all more popular, like solar (81% support in 2023, up from 79% in 2022), hydro (73%, down from 74%) and wind (67%, down from 68%).³⁷

Unsurprisingly those Australians most favorable towards gas are often supporters of more conservative political parties (Liberal/ National/ LNP parties 62%), and the states with big gas industries, including the Northern Territory (56% in 2023, well up from 31%), Western Australia (46%, down from 47%) and South Australia (37%, down from 50%) (GSCC 2023).³⁸

Interestingly, there is very low support for gas among Labor party supporters (26% in 2023, down from 30% in 2022).³⁹ This suggests we could leverage this to further pressure the federal, state and territory Labor governments to reduce their support for the gas industry and its continued expansion.

Overall, while there has been some progress in shifting public understanding that a move away from fossil fuels and gas is essential and inevitable, there is still a lot of work to be done to educate on the specific, detrimental impacts of gas.

As above, nearly a third of Australians see gas as a clean form of energy (38%) and just under a third (27%)⁴⁰ think it is part of the solution to climate change - this needs to change.⁴¹

Room for positivity

In [Australia's Biggest Climate Poll](#), published by the Australian Conservation Foundation in March 2022, more than 15,000 respondents were asked what solutions they'd like the Government to take to help Australia achieve deeper cuts to greenhouse emissions in the next decade.

The top ranked solution at 24% was to "replace gas and coal-fired power stations with renewable energy and battery storage".⁴²

More Australians also think a significant increase in renewable energy would lower bills (48%) than not, with 25% thinking it would not make a difference and 16% thinking more renewables would increase bills.⁴³

And, the [Climate Compass](#) (2022) research tells us that some Australians are already acting to directly cut their gas usage and carbon footprint and a lot of them would be open to taking more action. This includes replacing gas appliances with electric (13% have done it and 43% are open to it) or switching to a "greener" energy provider (17% have done it and 40% open to it).⁴⁴

Terminology

Methane:

- The major chemical compound in gas and a dangerous greenhouse gas, with up to 80 times more potency for causing global warming (known as 'warming potential') than carbon dioxide⁴⁵ in the short term.

Flaring:

- The burning of gas to get rid of unwanted supply,⁴⁶ for example when extracting oil, or to manage pressure in processing and storage systems.⁴⁷
- Burning methane releases carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Both methane and carbon dioxide are greenhouse gases that are fuelling global warming.
- The World Bank is calling for energy companies to stop almost all flaring by 2030,⁴⁸ because of concerns about the impact on climate change and the environment, and health risks for people living nearby.
- UK MPs and their Clean Air Task Force say that banning routine flaring and introducing additional measures to capture gas lost to leaky pipes could reduce up to 80% of methane emissions.⁴⁹

Venting:

- Occurs when gas is directly released to the atmosphere without being flared. This means methane, the major chemical compound in gas, enters the atmosphere and warms the climate.

Fugitive emissions:

- Emissions of greenhouse gases that occur during the extraction, processing and transportation of gas. According to a study published in July 2023⁵⁰ fugitive emissions are a huge source of emissions from gas extraction and LNG production, including the gas leaks that plague the industry⁵¹ and gas released during venting and flaring.⁵²
- Analysis of International Energy Agency data⁵³ in mid-2023 found fugitive methane emissions from Australia's coal, oil and gas industry could be nearly twice as high as current national estimates.⁵⁴

Two different types of gas are extracted:

- **Conventional gas:** Is trapped in naturally porous reservoirs underground that are capped with rock. When a well is drilled, gas flows to the surface without the need to pump.
- **Unconventional gas:** Is found in more complex rock formations which make it more difficult to extract. Three types of unconventional gas are extracted in Australia: coal seam gas, shale gas and tight gas.
 - **Coal seam gas (CSG)** holds methane and is found with underground coal seams, often held in place by pools of ancient groundwater ("fossil water"). This must be removed to access the gas (de-watering). CSG extraction can contaminate groundwater and aquifers, which has serious consequences for farmers. Coal seam gas extraction occasionally uses fracking to increase the supply.
 - **Shale gas** holds methane in clay-heavy, layered rock formations known as shales. Within shales, gas is contained in small pores that do not allow the gas to flow freely. Fracking is always required to access shale gas.
 - **Tight gas** is similar to shale gas, except that the methane is found in sandstone. As with shale gas, tight gas extraction always requires fracking.

Fracking (also known as 'hydraulic fracturing'):

- Fracking involves forcing massive quantities of sand-bearing water, loaded with chemicals - some of which are toxic - deep underground. The pressure behind the injected fluid mix creates and sustains new cracks and fissures in the rock, which allows gas to flow from these and be extracted more easily.
- It is one of the most environmentally damaging ways to extract gas⁵⁵ and can harm human health,⁵⁶ kill native animals, contaminate local land and pollute water supplies.⁵⁷

Carbon capture and storage (CCS) or Carbon capture, utilisation and storage (CCUS):

- CCS involves⁵⁸ attempting to capture, transport and store greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuel intensive activities, by injecting the captured greenhouse gases into rock formations and other forms of underground storage. CCS backers claim that it can be used to reduce the impact of highly-polluting coal and gas projects. CCS and CCUS technologies currently have not been proven to work at scale for capturing the emissions produced through fossil fuel extraction and processing. But even if it could, this still would not capture the emissions caused by burning coal and gas for energy - which make up the largest share of their harmful carbon pollution. CCS and CCUS can never be a real solution to gas emissions.

Debunking common gas industry claims

False claim: "Gas is a cleaner fuel than coal, producing as much as 50% less emissions"

- Gas emits less carbon dioxide (CO₂) than coal when burned, but it can be just as harmful to the climate due to methane leaks during its production and distribution. Methane, the main component of gas, is a potent greenhouse gas that warms the atmosphere 86 times as much as CO₂ in the short term.⁵⁹ Even small rates of methane leakage can make gas as big a driver of climate change as coal.⁶⁰ Studies have found gas leaks and the direct venting of gas in Australia can both contribute to excessive methane being released into the atmosphere.⁶¹
- Data released by the International Energy Agency has shown that methane released from Australian coal mines and gas production could be more than 60% higher than current government estimates.⁶² This means the gas industry is pumping a lot of harmful pollutants into the atmosphere, just like coal does.

False claim: "Australian LNG exports help to reduce global emissions, by reducing the burning of coal for power in some of our key export markets, especially in Asia."

- This claim was completely debunked by a CSIRO report commissioned by the gas giant Woodside,⁶³ supposedly to support a major planned new gas export project. The report "found increasing Australian gas supply could prolong coal, displace renewable [energy] and increase emissions in Asia without a global carbon price." Unsurprisingly, Woodside never released the report publicly and it only came to light following a leak to Nine Newspapers.⁶⁴

False claim: "The gas industry employs a lot of people, creates thousands of new jobs with new projects and is vital for the Australian economy."

- The Australian Pipelines and Gas Association CEO, Steve Davies, himself said, "The gas industry is a relatively small employer."⁶⁵
- Research shows gas is among the very worst options for creating jobs. Australian Bureau of Statistics data shows that in late 2023 the oil and gas extraction industry employed less than 0.2% of all Australian workers, compared with more than 15% in health care and social assistance and more than 8% in education and training.⁶⁶
- The gas industry is one of the least labour intensive industries in Australia. Australia Institute Principle Adviser Mark Ogge said the gas industry has what is called a "low labour intensity", which means it does not employ many people. "For every million dollars of output, the gas industry employs about 0.2 people, whereas for every million dollars of output in education or health, you employ upwards of 10 people."⁶⁷
- The majority of unconventional gas industry jobs are required for the short initial construction phase only, with a large proportion discontinuing once gasfields, pipelines, waste treatment facilities and processing plants are established.⁶⁸

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This guide was finalised by Dylan Quinnell at the CMC, in consultation with the Climate Council in November 2023.


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