

Western Australia and the Gorgon Gas Project

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Introduction

The Gorgon gas project was controversial from when it was first mooted. It also raised a suite of complex issues in relation to environmental impact assessment. The project involves the development of the Greater Gorgon Gas Field – Australia’s largest known gas resource – which is located between 130 kilometres and 200 kilometres off the coast of north-west Western Australia. It has four main components: the extraction of natural gas from the Gorgon Field and its transportation via sub-sea pipeline to Barrow Island; the construction and operation of a gas processing facility on Barrow Island, comprising two liquid natural gas (LNG) trains, which are expected to process around 10 million tonnes of LNG each year;¹ the construction of LNG shipping facilities adjacent to Barrow Island; and the geosequestration of carbon dioxide (CO₂) separated from the LNG below Barrow Island to reduce the greenhouse impacts of the project. The joint venture partners, Australian subsidiaries of Chevron, ExxonMobil and Shell – collectively known as the Gorgon Joint Venture (GJV) – claim the AU\$15 billion project will increase Western Australia’s gross State product by 4 per cent, provide 3500 direct and indirect jobs throughout the life of the project and generate around AU\$40 billion in government revenue.²

Although offering significant economic benefits, the project will come at a substantial environmental cost. The most controversial environmental issues associated with the project stem from the selection of Barrow Island as the site of the processing facilities. Barrow Island is a class A nature reserve renowned for its unique biodiversity. The extent of the conflict between conservation and mining interests was captured by the Western Australian Environmental Protection Authority (EPA), when it observed:

The proposal is unusual in that a major industrial complex is being proposed for a class A nature reserve with very important conservation values represented nowhere else in the world. There have been few, if any,

1 At the time of writing, the GJV was seeking approval for an enlargement of the project to enable production of 15 million tonnes per annum.

2 Chevron Australia, *Gorgon Project* <www.gorgon.com.au>.

This is a preview. Not all pages are shown.