Legislative Council
Environment and
Planning Committee

Decommissioning oil and gas infrastructure

Inquiry
June 2026

Published by order, or
under the authority, of the
Parliament of Victoria
June 2026

ISBN 978 0 908262 70 0 (print version)
ISBN 978 0 908262 71 7 (PDF version)
This report is available on the Committee's website:
parliament.vic.gov.au/epc-lc

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About the Committee

Functions

The functions of the Environment and Planning Committee are to inquire into and report on any proposal, matter or thing concerned with the arts, environment and planning the use, development and protection of land.

The Environment and Planning Committee may inquire into, hold public hearings, consider and report on any Bills or draft Bills referred by the Legislative Council, annual reports, estimates of expenditure or other documents laid before the Legislative Council in accordance with an Act, provided these are relevant to its functions.

Government Departments allocated for oversight:

- Department of the Environment, Land, Water and Planning
- Department of Premier and Cabinet.

Secretariat

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Contents

Terms of reference

Inquiry into decommissioning oil and gas infrastructure

On 28 August 2024, the Legislative Council agreed to the following motion:

That the Environment and Planning Committee inquire into, consider and report, by June 2026, on —

(a) the scale and legal ownership structure of Victoria's oil and gas infrastructure, including offshore wells, pipelines, high-pressure transmission and low pressure distribution systems, and relevant projects in Commonwealth waters;

(b) the scale and nature of oil and gas infrastructure requiring decommissioning over the coming decades, including onshore works and works in Commonwealth and Victorian waters;

(c) the regulatory powers of the Victorian Government to ensure oil and gas companies deliver planned and timely infrastructure decommissioning;

(d) any actions the Victorian Government can take to ensure oil and gas companies provide sufficiently to cover decommissioning costs;

(e) opportunities for employment in decommissioning;

(f) opportunities for Traditional Owner acknowledgement, consultation and employment where oil and gas infrastructure exists on their ancestral lands and/or Sea Country;

(g) identifying current and potential leaked greenhouse gases from Victoria's existing and retired oil and gas infrastructure, including relevant projects in Commonwealth waters and the quantity of leaks; and

(h) any actions the Victorian Government can take to cap and otherwise protect the population from leaked greenhouse gases across Victoria's existing and retired oil and gas infrastructure.

Chair's foreword

For more than half a century, oil and gas fields in the Bass Strait have powered homes, supported industries and created jobs for thousands of Victorians. Many of these fields are now reaching the end of their productive life. This Inquiry has examined how the infrastructure that supported Victoria's oil and gas production can be safely and responsibly removed.

The removal of this infrastructure over the coming decades will be an enormous undertaking. ExxonMobil Australia has commenced this work with its Decommissioning Campaign 1, which will see oil and gas platforms and supporting pylons removed from the Bass Strait and taken to Barry Beach Marine Terminal in South Gippsland for dismantling and processing. This decommissioning process has the potential to create jobs, strengthen regional economies and contribute to a circular economy.

This comes with challenges and risks. Decommissioning must be done well. It must ensure our marine and coastal environments are protected, it must be safe for workers, and it must deliver lasting benefits to Victorians.

The jurisdictional framework for sea based coastal infrastructure creates regulatory complexity as infrastructure spans both Commonwealth and Victorian territorial waters. Key to the success of decommissioning are the two levels of government working together for a common purpose.

Environmental concerns were front of mind during this Inquiry. Two key concerns related to whether oil and gas infrastructure should be fully removed or partly left in situ, and how to ensure that disused wells that have been plugged and abandoned do not leak. The Committee recommended the creation of a decommissioning framework that, among other things, sets clear expectations for full removal of infrastructure, unless it can be demonstrated that leaving infrastructure in situ would deliver better environmental outcomes. The Committee also recommended independent verification of plugging and abandonment of wells and the ongoing monitoring and rectification of plugged wells and other infrastructure left in situ.

The Committee was also mindful that Victorian taxpayers should not foot the bill for the costs of decommissioning. It recommended that the Victorian government mirror Commonwealth legislation in relation to trailing liability to ensure that companies pay the costs of their own decommissioning.

The Inquiry was informed about the potential for decommissioning to support jobs, including in onshore dismantling and recycling. These opportunities have the potential to align with emerging sectors like offshore wind, and can underpin a workforce transition for communities in Gippsland who have supported the industry for many decades.

We must ensure that these communities have the right infrastructure, housing and services to meet the needs for decommissioning. Government and industry must work together to ensure communities are supported and can fully benefit from this work.

The Committee thanks all those who contributed to this Inquiry, including individuals, community groups, industry representatives, unions, academics and government agencies.

I would also like to recognise the work of my fellow Committee Members, who worked diligently and cooperatively throughout the Inquiry.

Finally, I thank the Committee Secretariat for their assistance throughout the Inquiry, including in organising public hearings and helping the Committee to prepare this Final Report. Their hard work is appreciated.

Ryan Batchelor MLC
Chair

Findings and recommendations

2 Overview of Victoria's oil and gas infrastructure and the decommissioning process

3 Decommissioning infrastructure offshore

4 Victoria's role in the onshore decommissioning process

What happens next?

There are several stages to a parliamentary inquiry.

The Committee conducts the Inquiry

This Report on the Inquiry into decommissioning oil and gas infrastructure in Victoria is the result of extensive research and consultation by the Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee.

The Committee received written submissions, spoke with people at public hearings, reviewed research evidence and deliberated over a number of meetings. Experts, government representatives and individuals expressed their views directly to us as Members of Parliament.

A parliamentary committee is not part of the Government. The Committee is a group of members of different political parties (including independent members). Parliament has asked us to look closely at an issue and report back. This process helps Parliament do its work by encouraging public debate and involvement in issues.

You can learn more about the Committee's work at: https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/oilgasinfrastructure.

The report is presented to Parliament

This Report was presented to Parliament and can be found at: https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/get-involved/inquiries/oilgasinfrastructure/reports.

A response from the Government

The Government has six months to respond in writing to any recommendations made in this Report.

The response is public and put on the inquiry page of Parliament's website when it is received at: https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/get-involved/inquiries/oilgasinfrastructure/reports.

In its response, the Government indicates whether it supports the Committee's recommendations. It can also outline actions it may take.

Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 The Inquiry process

The Committee received its Terms of Reference from the Legislative Council on 28 August 2024.

Submissions to the Inquiry opened on 19 August 2025. A call for submissions was advertised across social media and through a media release. The Committee identified and invited 75 organisations and individuals to provide a submission.

The Committee accepted 164 submissions by the closing date on 7 November 2025. These included submissions from government regulators, the oil and gas industry and academics. A number of individuals provided submissions, including a significant cohort of people local to Gippsland, where much of the oil and gas infrastructure will be decommissioned.

The Committee held private briefings with Resources Victoria, DEECA and ExxonMobil Australia to assist it in understanding the technical nature of the Inquiry.

Public hearings were held on:

- 10 December 2025 in Melbourne
- 11 February 2026 in Leongatha
- 6 March 2026 in Melbourne.

The Committee also conducted a site visit at Barry Beach Marine Terminal in South Gippsland to see the proposed area for the dismantling of a significant proportion of Victoria's oil and gas infrastructure.

The Committee thanks all those who gave their time and expertise to assist in its Inquiry, including through submissions, public hearings, briefings and a site visit.

1.2 The scope of this Report

The Terms of Reference asks the Committee to consider and report on matters concerning the decommissioning of Victoria's oil and gas infrastructure including offshore wells, pipelines, high-pressure transmission and low-pressure distribution systems, and relevant projects in Commonwealth waters. This includes onshore works as well as those in Victorian and Commonwealth waters.

Victoria's historically abundant, but finite gas reserves have fuelled the State's development and prosperity for many decades. Natural gas is used across the economy and is delivered to homes and businesses by a vast network of transmission pipelines and pumps. As Victoria's gas supply depletes and the Victorian Government moves to transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy, much of Victoria's gas network will be substituted with alternative sources of energy.[1]

Victoria's offshore oil and gas fields in the Bass Strait began operation in the 1960s and have been Victoria's main source of oil and gas, producing approximately 12.7 trillion cubic feet of natural gas.[2] Many of these fields are now reaching the end of their productive life and the oil and gas infrastructure that supported their production will need to be decommissioned and removed from the ocean in a timely and environmentally safe manner. The scope of this decommissioning is outlined further in Chapter 2.

A significant majority of the evidence received by the Committee related to the decommissioning of this oil and gas infrastructure in the Bass Strait. As a result, the scope of this Report has been contained to that effort, the Victorian Government's regulatory settings for doing so, and the economic opportunities for Victoria associated with the dismantling and recycling of the infrastructure.

The Committee notes that several submissions and witnesses, including Infrastructure Victoria and the Energy Futures Network, discussed the transition away from gas to renewables and the implications for the broader gas network. As this was outside of the Terms of Reference, the Committee did not explore this issue in depth. This may be an area for future inquiry.

1 Infrastructure Victoria, *Submission 48.1*, p. 4.

2 Resources Victoria, *Oil and gas*, 2026, <https://resources.vic.gov.au/geology-and-data/oil-gas> accessed 18 May 2026.

Chapter 2
Overview of Victoria's oil and gas infrastructure and the decommissioning process

2.1 Introduction

This Chapter provides an overview of the scale and nature of Victoria's offshore oil and gas infrastructure, and the offshore decommissioning process in Victoria. In particular, ExxonMobil Australia's (ExxonMobil) impending decommissioning campaign of its assets in the Bass Strait.

2.2 The scale of Victoria's oil and gas infrastructure

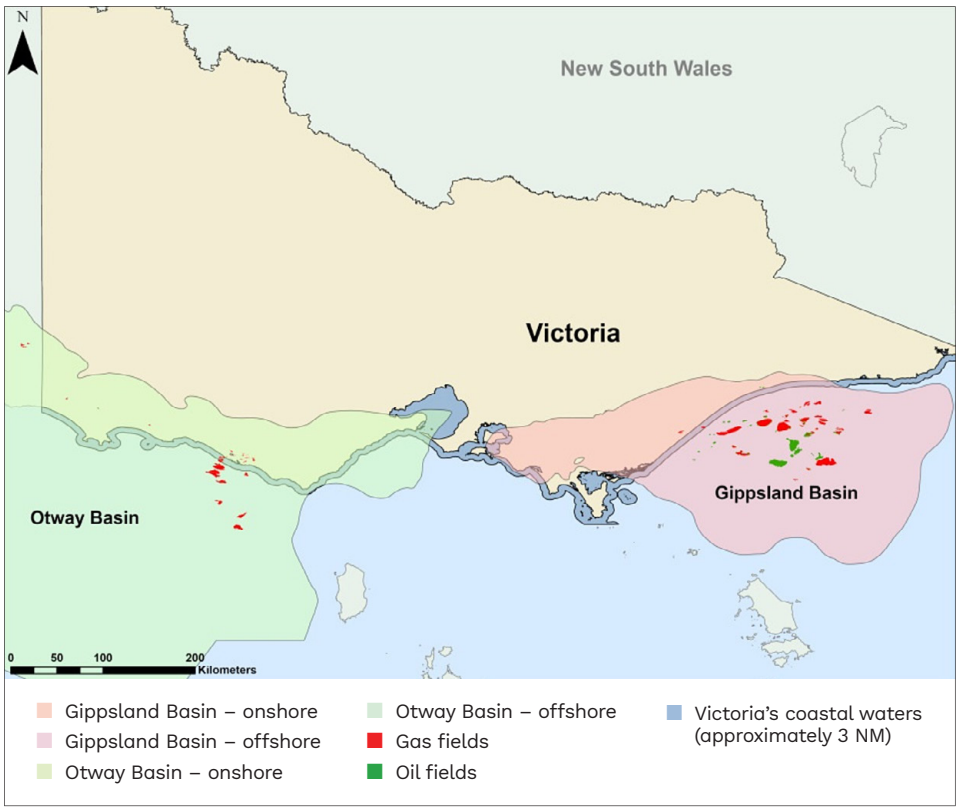
The majority of Victoria's oil and gas fields are located offshore. This Section outlines the scale and nature of Victoria's offshore oil and gas production, transport and storage infrastructure. Victoria's offshore oil and gas infrastructure sits in both Commonwealth and State jurisdictions (see Figure 2.1) where:

- infrastructure in Victorian State waters is within 3 nautical miles (around 5.56 km) of the Victorian coast
- infrastructure in Commonwealth waters is located outside 3 nautical miles of Victoria's coast, and within the Australian continental shelf.[1]

Different regulatory arrangements apply depending on whether infrastructure is in State waters or Commonwealth waters. This will be addressed in Sections 2.2.1, 2.2.2 and 2.6.

1 *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2006* (Cth) s 4.

Figure 2.1 Oil and gas production in Victoria



Source: Resources Victoria, *Oil and Gas*, 2026, <https://resources.vic.gov.au/geology-and-data/oil-gas> accessed 4 May 2026

2.2.1 Oil and gas infrastructure in Victorian State waters

Offshore oil and gas production in Victoria's state jurisdiction is limited. There are no offshore oil production platforms or drill rigs located within 3 nautical miles of the coast.[2] Offshore gas production in State waters comprises of five active wells, and four wells which have previously been decommissioned.[3] Linda Bibby, Acting Executive Director at Resources Victoria, noted that wells in State waters are extended-reach directional wells. These wells are drilled from onshore locations and access offshore gas wells by drilling under the sea.[4] Production infrastructure for all State wells is located onshore, at locations between Port Campbell and Warrnambool.[5] Active wells located in State waters are listed in Table 2.1.

The oil and gas infrastructure located in State waters is comprised entirely of pipelines that transport oil and gas from production infrastructure in Commonwealth waters to the Victorian coast.[6] In State waters, Victoria has granted 14 pipeline licences, totalling 78km of pipeline. They are listed in Table 2.2.[7]

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2 Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, responses to questions on notice received 10 February 2026, p. 12.

3 Ibid.

4 Linda Bibby, Executive Director of Earth Resources Policy and Programs, Resources Victoria, Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 41.

5 Ibid.

6 Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, responses to questions on notice received 10 February 2026, p. 12.

7 Ibid.

Table 2.1 Active wells in Victorian waters

Duty holder	Well	Location	Age
Beach Energy (Operations) Limited	Black Watch 1	Otway Basin	Drilled in April 2020, production ongoing
Beach Energy (Operations) Limited	Enterprise 1	Otway Basin	Drilled in December 2020, production ongoing
Beach Energy (Operations) Limited	Halladale 2	Otway Basin	Drilled in 2014–15, production ongoing
Beach Energy (Operations) Limited	Speculant 1	Otway Basin	Drilled in 2014–15, production ongoing
Beach Energy (Operations) Limited	Speculant ST1	Otway Basin	Drilled in 2014–15, production ongoing

Source: NOPSEMA, *Submission 24*, p. 13.

Table 2.2 Pipelines in Victorian waters

Duty holder	Pipeline Facility	Location	Licence
Beach Energy (Operations) Limited	Otway Subsea Pipeline	Otway Basin	VIC/PL36(V)
Beach Energy (Operations) Limited	Yolla A Pipeline	Otway Basin	VIC/PL34(V)
Cooper Energy (CH) Pty. Ltd Limited	Casino Pipeline	Otway Basin	VIC/PL37(V)
Cooper Energy (PBF) Pty. Ltd.	Patricia Baleen Pipeline	Bass Strait	VIC/PL31(V)
Cooper Energy (Sole) Pty. Ltd.	Sole Offshore Pipeline	Bass Strait	VIC/PL006401(V)
Esso Australia Pty Ltd	Barracouta to Shore	Bass Strait	VIC/PL1(V)
Esso Australia Pty Ltd	Barracouta to Shore	Bass Strait	VIC/PL4(V)
Esso Australia Pty Ltd	Bream A to Shore	Bass Strait	VIC/PL32(V)
Esso Australia Pty Ltd	Halibut to Shore	Bass Strait	VIC/PL5(V)
Esso Australia Pty Ltd	Marlin to Shore	Bass Strait	VIC/PL2(V)
Esso Australia Pty Ltd	Perch to Shore	Bass Strait	VIC/PL21(V)
Esso Australia Pty Ltd	Snapper to Shore	Bass Strait	VIC/PL13(V)
Tasmanian Gas Pipeline Pty Ltd	Tasmanian Gas Pipeline	Bass Strait	VIC/PL30(V)
Woodside Energy Global Pty Ltd	Minerva Pipeline	Otway Basin	VIC/PL33(V)

Source: NOPSEMA, *Submission 24*, pp. 11–12.

2.2.2 Infrastructure in Commonwealth waters

All offshore oil and gas production infrastructure off the Victorian coast is located in Commonwealth waters. In Victoria, oil and gas production is primarily located in the Bass Strait and the Otway Basin, as noted in Figure 2.1.[8]

8 Centre of Decommissioning Australia, *Submission 34*, p. 3.

The Committee received inconsistent information from stakeholders with respect to the scale of production platforms in Commonwealth waters. The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) told the Committee, in response to Questions on Notice, that there are 21 platforms in Commonwealth waters.[9] In their public hearing, representatives from Resources Victoria noted that there are 'about 20' platforms.[10] The Centre of Decommissioning Australia (CODA), Australia's peak body for the decommissioning industry, told the Committee in their submission and in public hearings that there are 22 platforms in operation.[11] Dr Kylie Walker, Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering, noted 23 offshore platforms.[12]

The Committee also heard disparate information in defining the amount of other oil and gas infrastructure in Commonwealth waters such as wells and pipelines. DEECA stated that Commonwealth waters contained over 400 wells and over 2,000 km of pipelines.[13]

CODA told the Committee about its publicly accessible online dashboard that captures the scale and nature of Australia's offshore oil and gas infrastructure.[14] For 1 January 2025, the dashboard provides statistics for Victoria's oil and gas infrastructure as:

- 255 oil and gas wells
- 1,437 km of pipelines
- 138 km of infield lines
- 489 km of static umbilicals
- 58 other subsea structures.[15]

This conflicting evidence reflects a wider issue about the accessibility of information for offshore oil and gas infrastructure, which many stakeholders also raised. These stakeholders, which included individuals and environmental groups, explained to the Committee that a publicly accessible, central register of Victoria's offshore oil and gas infrastructure does not exist.[16]

This issue is further explored in Sections 3.4.3 and 3.7.4.

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9 Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, responses to questions on notice received 10 February 2026, p. 12.

10 Linda Bibby, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 41.

11 Centre of Decommissioning Australia, *Submission 34*, p. 7.

12 Dr Kylie Walker, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering, public hearing, Melbourne, 10 December 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 49.

13 Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, responses to questions on notice received 10 February 2026, p. 12.

14 Centre of Decommissioning Australia, *Submission 34*, p. 5.

15 Ibid, p. 7.

16 Dr Kylie Walker, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 42; Anda Banikos, public hearing, Leongatha, 11 February 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 30; Peter Wilkinson, *Submission 40*, p. 1; Name Withheld, *Submission 41*, p. 1; Cassandra Arnold, *Submission 42*, p. 2; Russel Baader, *Submission 60*, p. 1; Sarah Brennan, *Submission 64*, p. 1; Myra DeSmet, *Submission 76*, p. 1; Ian Russell, *Submission 82*, p. 1; Name Withheld, *Submission 87*, p. 2; Dr Robyn Prior, *Submission 90*, p. 1; Alison Cooke, *Submission 94*, p. 3; The Wilderness Society, *Submission 148*, p. 7.

2.2.3 Oil and gas infrastructure in the Bass Strait

The Bass Strait, which includes the Gippsland Basin, contains the densest concentration of oil and gas infrastructure off the Victorian coast. As noted in Chapter 1, a significant proportion of the oil and gas infrastructure in the Bass Strait is due to be decommissioned in the coming years, as the oil fields in the Gippsland Basin reach the end of their productive life. Because of this, this report will not address in depth the decommissioning of infrastructure in the Otway Basin, as there is less infrastructure there that is due to be decommissioned.

The Committee heard that oil and gas fields in the Bass Strait have historically been a major supplier of Australian oil and gas. Since the discovery of offshore gas at the Barracouta Field in 1965, the Gippsland Basin has produced almost half of Australia's crude oil. The area currently produces 60% of the gas supply for South-East Australia.[17]

Further, the Committee heard that oil and gas production has been significant in underpinning the manufacturing industry and economy in Victoria, and a major provider of jobs in South Gippsland.[18] Cr John Schelling of South Gippsland Shire Council told the Committee that Esso and BHP's operations at Barry Beach were pivotal in securing jobs for Gippsland residents in towns such as Toora and Welshpool, as well as supporting local services and the development of communities.[19]

Infrastructure in the Bass Strait consists of facilities owned under the Gippsland Basin Joint Venture, the Kipper Joint Venture and the Gippsland Offshore Development. ExxonMobil told the Committee that it owns and operates the following infrastructure in the Bass Strait as part of the Gippsland Basin Joint Venture and the Kipper Joint Venture:

- 421 wells
- 19 platforms
- 6 subsea facilities
- over 840 km of subsea pipeline, with 790km in Commonwealth waters and 50km in State waters.[20]

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17 Richard Perry, Major Projects Manager, Australia, ExxonMobil, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence* p. 44.

18 Cr John Schelling, South Gippsland Shire Council, public hearing, Leongatha, 11 February 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 22–23; Richard Perry, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 42–43.

19 Cr John Schelling, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 23.

20 ExxonMobil, *Submission 137*, p. 1; ExxonMobil, *Bass Strait Operations: Decommissioning Report 2024*, 2025, p. 4.

Box 2.1 Esso and ExxonMobil Australia

Esso Australia is a subsidiary of ExxonMobil Australia. It is the brand that operates oil and gas infrastructure in the Bass Strait. However, much of the evidence received by the Committee refers to ExxonMobil when discussing the Bass Strait oil and gas infrastructure. As a result, this Report will use the term ExxonMobil rather than Esso throughout, except where addressing issues around legal title ownership.

Source: ExxonMobil Australia, *Submission 137,* p. 1.

Details of ExxonMobil's 19 oil and gas production platforms are outlined in Table 2.3, which vary in distance to the Victorian coast, water depth and structure type.

Table 2.3 Production platforms in the Bass Strait

Platform name	Type	Distance to coast (km)	Water depth (m)	Status
Barracouta	SPJ	23	46	Productive
Bream A	SPJ	46	59	Not productive
Bream B	CGS	51	61	Not Productive
Cobia	SPJ	69	79	Not Productive
Dolphin	MT	21	38	Not Productive
Flounder	SPJ	58	93	Not Productive
Fortescue	SPJ	64	69	Not Productive
Halibut	SPJ	64	73	Not Productive
Kingfish A	SPJ	77	77	Not Productive
Kingfish B	SPJ	77	78	Not Productive
Mackerel	SPJ	73	93	Not Productive
Marlin A	SPJ	42	59	Productive
Marlin B	SPJ	42	59	Productive
Perch	MT	24	42	Not Productive
Snapper	SPJ	32	55	Productive
Tuna	SPJ	43	59	Productive
West Kingfish	SPJ	72	76	Not Productive
West Tuna	CGS +SPJ	45	61	Productive
Whiting	SPJ	34	54	Not Productive

Source: ExxonMobil, *Bass Strait Operations: Decommissioning Report 2024*, p. 2.

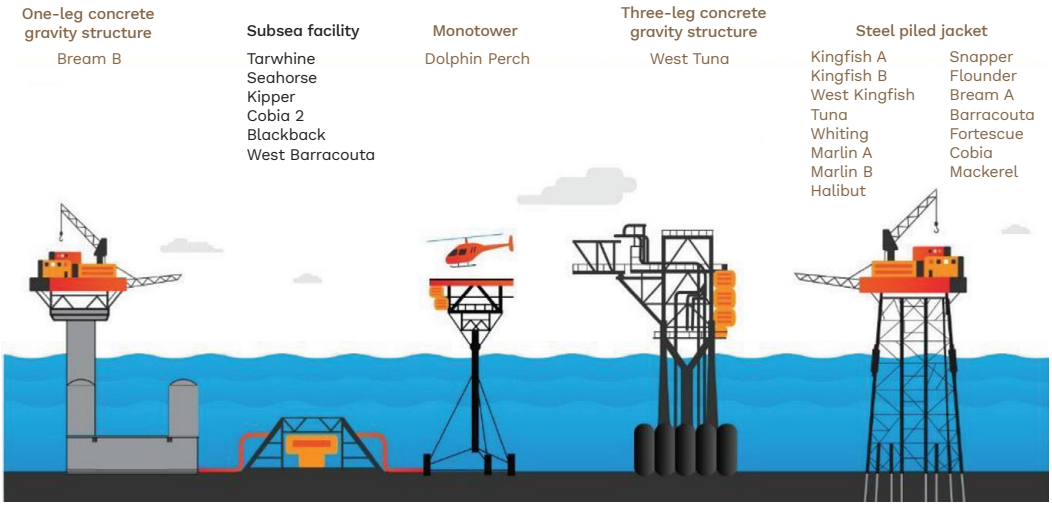
ExxonMobil operates four different types of production platforms in the Bass Strait:

- One-leg concrete gravity structure (CGS) (1 facility)
- Monotower (MT) (2 facilities)

- Three-leg concrete gravity structure (1 facility)
- Steel piled jacket (SPJ) (15 facilities).[21]

The most common type of production platform in the Bass Strait is the steel piled jacket, which has a steel base structure that is fastened to the seabed by piles that support topside infrastructure, including production infrastructure and living quarters.[22] Concrete gravity structures include a concrete platform built directly into the seabed. They are capable of withstanding environmental forces through their own weight. Monotowers are fixed installation platforms, primarily consisting of a steel, gravity-based tower with an iron ore ballast.[23] These structures are depicted in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2 ExxonMobil's oil and gas production platforms in the Bass Strait



Source: ExxonMobil, *Bass Strait Operations: Decommissioning Report 2024*, 2025, p. 3.

Amplitude Energy (formerly Cooper Energy) also operates infrastructure in the Bass Strait under the Gippsland Offshore Development. The Development consists of:

- The Sole gas field, consisting of two subsea wells connected to the Orborst Gas Plant by a subsea pipeline. This field is currently productive.
- The Patricia-Baleen gas fields, consisting of two subsea wells connected to the Orborst Gas Plant by a subsea pipeline. This field is currently non-productive.
- The Basker Manta Gummy oil and gas fields, consisting of seven subsea wells. This field is currently non-productive, with production infrastructure removed in 2010.[24]

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21 ExxonMobil, *Bass Strait Operations: Decommissioning Report 2024*, p. 2.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid, p. 4.

24 NOPSEMA, *Project – Gippsland Offshore Development*, 2026, <https://info.nopsema.gov.au/offshore_projects/10/show_public> accessed 4 May 2026.

2.3 The legal ownership structure of Victoria's oil and gas infrastructure

Tables 1.1 and 1.2 outline the legal ownership structure of offshore oil and gas infrastructure in State waters. Beach Energy (Operations) Limited owns all infrastructure associated with Victoria's five wells drilled into offshore State waters. Three main operators, Esso Australia, Amplitude Energy and Beach Energy, own the majority of pipelines in State waters, which transport oil and gas from their wells in Commonwealth waters.

The Gippsland Basin Joint Venture and the Kipper Joint Venture own the majority of offshore oil and gas infrastructure in Commonwealth waters in the Bass Strait, including all oil and gas production platforms.

Esso Australia, which is a subsidiary of ExxonMobil Australia, operates the Gippsland Basin Joint Venture. It is jointly owned by Esso Australia and Woodside Energy, with both parties holding a 50% ownership share. The Kipper Joint Venture is similarly operated by Esso Australia. It is owned partially by Esso Australia (32.5%), Woodside Energy (32.5%) and Mitsui (35%).[25]

Woodside Energy announced on 29 July 2025 an agreement with Esso Australia to assume operatorship of oil and gas assets in the Bass Strait. The agreement is subject to regulatory approvals and a decision will be reached in the second half of 2026.[26] In a public hearing, Andrew Lobb, Vice President of Decommissioning at Woodside Energy, told the Committee that the planned transfer of operatorship would not change ExxonMobil's current decommissioning plans, and would not impact upon the equity share of ownership of Bass Strait assets.[27] This issue is discussed further in Chapter 3 and 4.

Other production leases in Commonwealth waters off Victoria's coastline include:

- The Henry, Nertherby, Casino and Minerva fields, operated by Amplitude Energy (formerly Cooper Energy).[28]
- The Geographe Thylacine field, operated by Beach Energy.[29]
- The Longtom field, operated by Nexus Energy, a subsidiary of Seven Group Holdings.[30]
- The Gippsland Offshore Development, operated by Amplitude Energy.[31]

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25 Woodside Energy, *Bass Strait*, 2026, <https://www.woodside.com/what-we-do/operations/bass-strait> accessed 4 May 2026.

26 Andrew Lobb, Vice-President, Decommissioning, Woodside Energy, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 56.

27 Ibid.

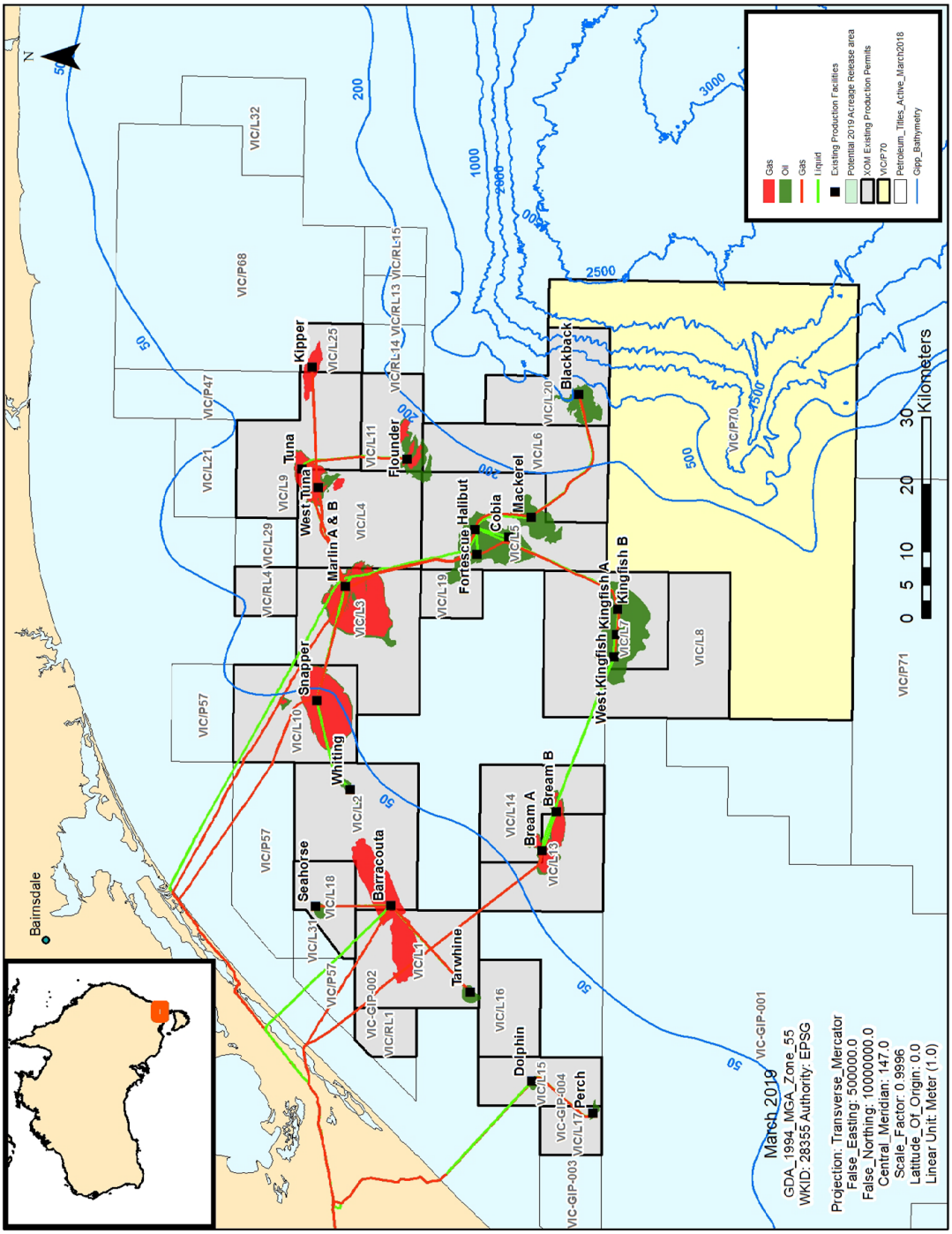
28 NOPSEMA, *Project – Casino, Henry and Netherby Development*, 2026, <https://info.nopsema.gov.au/offshore_projects/9/show_public> accessed 4 May 2026.

29 NOPSEMA, *Project – Otway Offshore Development (Thylacine and Geographe)*, 2026, <https://info.nopsema.gov.au/offshore_projects/16/show_public> accessed 4 May 2026.

30 NOPSEMA, *Project – Longtom Gas*, 2026, <https://info.nopsema.gov.au/offshore_projects/27/show_public> accessed 4 May 2026.

31 NOPSEMA, *Project – Gippsland Offshore Development*, 2026, <https://info.nopsema.gov.au/offshore_projects/10/show_public> accessed 4 May 2026.

Figure 2.3 Infrastructure owned under the Gippsland Basin Joint Venture and Kipper Joint Venture



Note: Gas fields are shown in red and oil fields are shown in green.

Source: NOPSEMA, *Project – Bass Strait Development*, 2026, <https://info.nopsema.gov.au/offshore_projects/14/show_public> accessed 4 May 2026.

2.4 What is decommissioning and why is it essential?

2.4.1 What is decommissioning?

In 2022, the Commonwealth Department of Industry, Science and Resources (DISR) published the Australian Government's guidelines for offshore decommissioning. In the guide, DISR identifies decommissioning as an activity that occurs at the end of the production cycle of offshore petroleum infrastructure.[32] The Department states that the purpose of decommissioning is:

> To remove or otherwise satisfactorily deal with, in a safe and environmentally responsible manner, structures, equipment and property previously used to support activities in the offshore area. This includes plugging and abandoning wells, rehabilitating the site and carrying out any necessary monitoring.[33]

Further, the Department sets out four key principles around which effective decommissioning is centred:

- decommissioning is the responsibility of titleholders
- early planning for decommissioning is encouraged
- removal of all property from the title area is the default decommissioning requirement
- decommissioning must be completed before the end of title.[34]

Linda Bibby, Acting Executive Director of Policy and Programs at Resources Victoria, gave an overview of a Victorian Government approach:

> The decommissioning process involves initial planning and permitting for the removal of structures, well plugging and abandonment, removal of structures, transport to ports and onshore processing, recycling and disposal of materials.[35]

The Committee heard evidence from Professor Tina Soliman-Hunter, Professor of Energy and Resources Law at Macquarie University, who highlighted that Norway's decommissioning process incorporates a whole of lifecycle approach, referred to as DPRD:

- **Dismantling**: involving the removal of infrastructure from the site of production.
- **Processing**: where material is brought to shore, disassembled and cleaned of potential contaminants.

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32 Department of Industry, Science and Resources, *Guideline: offshore petroleum decommissioning*, 2 March 2022, p. 4.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid, pp. 5–7.

35 Linda Bibby, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 34.

- **Recycling**: where materials such as concrete and steel are repurposed for future use, as appropriate.
- **Disposal**: involving the safe disposal of unusable or contaminated infrastructure.[36]

Professor Tina Soliman-Hunter described an understanding of decommissioning that incorporates a whole of lifestyle approach as the 'gold standard'.[37] The Committee heard that a whole-of-lifecycle approach is essential to effective decommissioning, as it takes into consideration not only activities offshore, but what happens with materials onshore.[38] As such, this approach ensures that the maximum benefits of decommissioning can be understood and capitalised on, as well as ensuring that potential risks across the decommissioning lifecycle can be best mitigated.[39]

FINDING 1: A best practice approach to decommissioning considers all stages of the decommissioning life cycle, including dismantling, processing, recycling and disposal.

2.4.2 Why decommissioning is essential

The timely decommissioning of infrastructure is necessary to manage the environmental and human health risks posed by this infrastructure. These risks include:

- degradation of topside infrastructure, creating dangerous work environments[40]
- components breaking off structures, such as plastic, into the marine environment[41]
- failing infrastructure releasing contaminants into the marine environment, including methane, mercury and naturally occurring radioactive materials.[42]

Evidence was received that as offshore oil and gas infrastructure ages, it becomes more prone to degradation. As a result, decommissioning becomes a more difficult and dangerous task as infrastructure degrades.[43]

Chapter 3 further addresses the risks of degrading infrastructure.

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36 Professor Tina Soliman-Hunter, Energy and Resources Law, Macquarie Law School, Macquarie University, public hearing, Melbourne, 10 December 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

40 Maritime Union of Australia, *Submission 156*, p. 10.

41 Fern Cadman, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 23; Maritime Union of Australia, *Submission 156*, p. 10.

42 Fern Cadman, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 27; Dr Tom Cresswell, Researcher, Ecotoxicology and Radioecology, Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 16; Friends of the Earth Melbourne, *Submission 105*, p. 4; Maritime Union of Australia, *Submission 156*, p. 10.

43 Fern Cadman, Fossil Fuel Industry Campaigner, Wilderness Society, public hearing, Melbourne, 10 December 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 24.

2.5 The decommissioning outlook for Victoria

Much of Victoria's oil and gas infrastructure is ageing and is at or near the end of its productive life. The Committee heard evidence that the State's oil and gas infrastructure off the coast of Gippsland is among the oldest in Australia, having produced oil and gas since the 1960's.[44]

All of Victoria's oil and gas infrastructure will need to be decommissioned at the end of its productive life cycle. Regulatory decisions concerning the level of removal will determine the scale of infrastructure to be decommissioned (see Section 3.4.2). Consequently, this will influence the amount of material to be brought onshore into Victoria. However, the current legislative base case is full removal, unless it can be shown that the impact on the environment will be equal to that of full removal.

As noted in Section 2.6.1, at a minimum, all offshore infrastructure will need to be removed to a height of 55 metres below sea level.

The Committee heard evidence that decommissioning represents a potential $7 billion industry for Victoria, including employment for removal works offshore, and dismantling works and recycling of materials onshore.[45] The Australian Steel Institute estimated that 60,000 tonnes of steel could be made available for recycling through the first tranche of decommissioning in the Bass Strait, with significant quantities to be made available in further decommissioning.[46] These issues are explored further in Chapter 5.

The decommissioning of oil and gas infrastructure off Victoria's coast has already begun, and a significant proportion of works will be undertaken in the coming years. *Australia's Offshore Resources Decommissioning Roadmap* notes that infrastructure off the coast of Victoria, particularly in the Gippsland Basin, will represent the first major decommissioning projects in Australia. Significant works began in 2023. Victoria's decommissioning load is projected to continue until the 2038–42 period. The most significant period of these works will occur between 2023–27. This represents just under $4 billion USD of works and investment.[47] This work is mostly representative of the decommissioning of infrastructure in the Bass Strait.

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44 Centre of Decommissioning Australia, *Submission 34*, p. 6.

45 Kevin Morrison, Energy Finance Analyst, Australian Gas, Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis, public hearing, Melbourne, 10 December 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 43.

46 Jerusha Beresford, Sustainability Adviser, Australian Steel Institute, public hearing, Melbourne, 10 December 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 52.

47 Department of Industry, Science and Resources, *Australia's offshore resources decommissioning roadmap*, December 2024, p. 7.

2.5.1 ExxonMobil's Decommissioning Campaign 1

As noted in the previous Section, the decommissioning of oil and gas infrastructure in the Bass Strait will be among the first and most significant in Victoria's decommissioning outlook.[48]

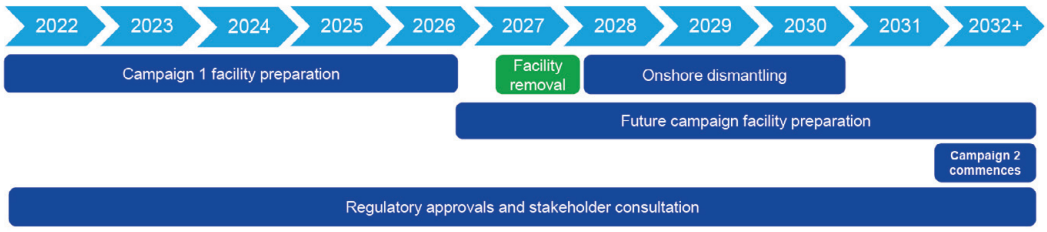
The Commonwealth regulator, the National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority (NOPSEMA) issued ExxonMobil with a General Direction to undertake decommissioning on 20 May 2021. The Direction required ExxonMobil to undertake all appropriate planning and commence decommissioning activities for its offshore oil and gas assets in the Bass Strait.[49] ExxonMobil has detailed its plans under Decommissioning Campaign 1, which describes the decommissioning of 13 platforms, four subsea facilities, 26 pipelines and more than half of its operated wells.

In its submission to the Inquiry, ExxonMobil told the Committee that the majority of its production platforms in the Bass Strait are no longer producing oil and gas. It noted that six platforms remain, which will continue to produce gas until the mid-2030s.[50]

ExxonMobil estimated that decommissioning works to date have grown their workforce by 300–500 staff, with a further 50–100 jobs expected to be created in order to support the dismantling and recycling of platforms.[51]

ExxonMobil's Campaign 1 involves the initial removal of non-productive infrastructure, with activities to be completed by September 2027. The Campaign will be undertaken in three stages.

Figure 2.4 Indicative timeline for ExxonMobil's Campaign 1



Source: Richard Perry, Major Projects Manager Australia ExxonMobil, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 March 2026, presentation, p. 10.

48 Ibid.

49 NOPSEMA, *General direction 817*, 20 March 2021, <https://www.nopsema.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-06/A783674.pdf> accessed 4 May 2025.

50 ExxonMobil Australia, *Submission 137*, p. 1.

51 Ibid.

Stage 1: Pre-removal activities

ExxonMobil told the Committee that (as of March 2026) they had undertaken significant pre-removal activities, including:

- over $3 billion of decommissioning activities, including the permanent sealing of over 200 wells
- obtaining over 80 regulatory approvals at a Commonwealth, State and local council level
- undertaking over 30,000 local stakeholder interactions to discuss decommissioning since 2020, including over 25,000 emails and 380 meetings.[52]

Stage 2: Removal of offshore facillities

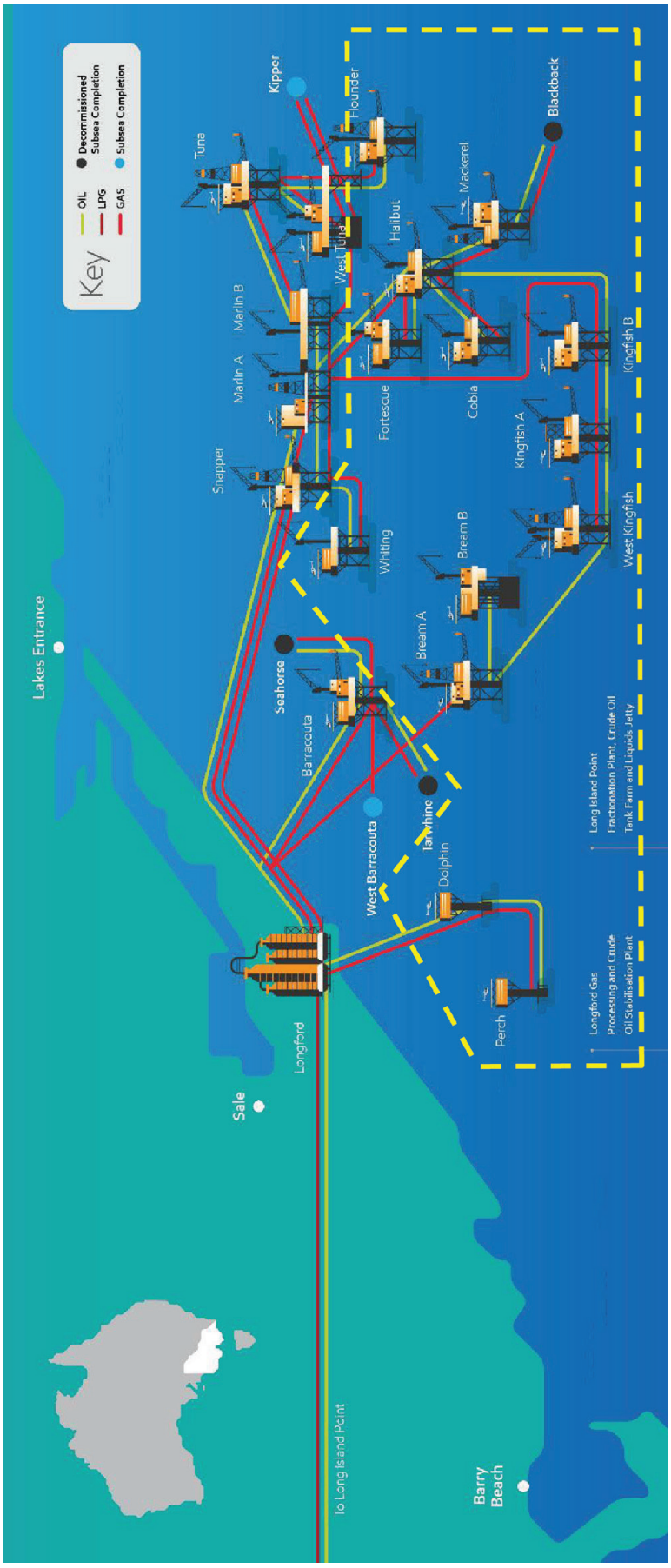
The second stage of ExxonMobil's Campaign 1 involves the removal of topsides and upper sections of non-productive oil and gas production infrastructure. In its 2025 decommissioning report, ExxonMobil noted that this has thus far involved plans to remove infrastructure including:

- removal of topsides and jackets to as close as practicable to the seabed for Whiting and Bream A platforms
- removal of topsides and upper jacket sections to at least 55 metres below sea level for the Flounder, Kingfish A, Kingfish B and Mackerel platforms
- removal of topsides and jacket for Fortescue, either to as close practicable to the seabed or to at least 55 metres below sea level, dependent on the 'outcome of detailed removal engineering'
- removal of Bream B topside and support frame only, with the substructure to remain in place
- removal of two monotowers and gravity base foundations (Dolphin and Perch).[53]

52 Richard Perry, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 43–44.

53 ExxonMobil, B*ass Strait Operations: General Direction 817 Decommissioning Progress Report 2025*, 2026, p. 1.

Figure 2.5 ExxonMobil's infrastructure in the Bass Strait

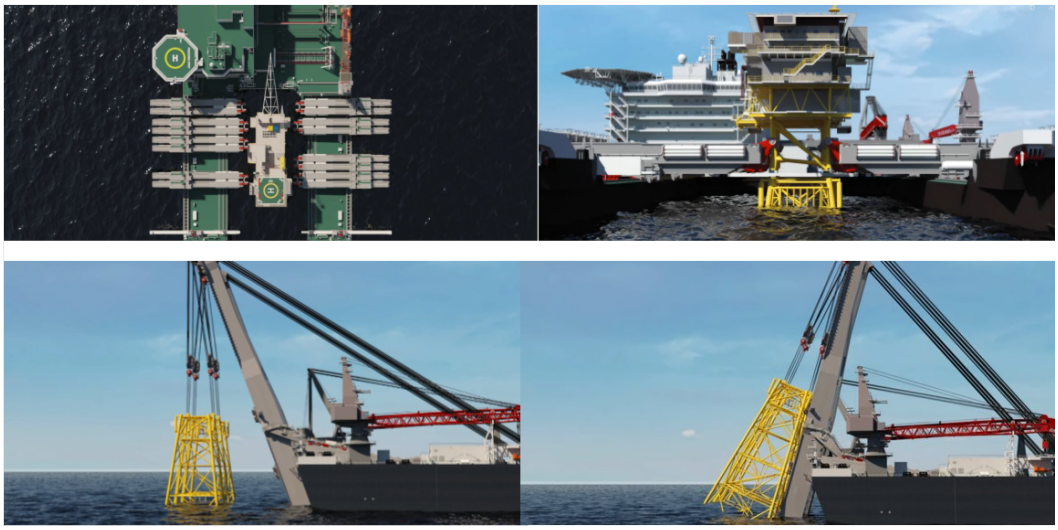


Source: Richard Perry, Major Projects Manager Australia ExxonMobil, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 March 2026, presentation, p. 5.

ExxonMobil told the Committee that they had employed a Dutch marine contractor, Allseas, to undertake the removal of topside structures.[54] The foreign flagged vessel, *Pioneering Spirit*, is a vessel that is designed for removal works, and has undertaken these activities for over 15 years. ExxonMobil told the Committee that once removed, the structures will be transferred to barges in Commonwealth waters, which in turn will transport the decommissioned material through Corner Inlet and to Barry Beach Marine Terminal.[55]

Figures 2.6 and 2.7 show the process for removing and transporting the topsides to Barry Beach Marine Terminal.

Figure 2.6 The removal process for Campaign 1, including removal of topside infrastructure, followed by the removal of steel piled jackets



Source: Richard Perry, Major Projects Manager Australia ExxonMobil, presentation, supplementary evidence, received 6 March 2026, p. 16.

54 Richard Perry, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 45.

55 Ibid.

Figure 2.7 Allseas *Pioneering Spirit* removing subsea infrastructure

Source: Allseas, *Gippsland EPR*, 2026, <https://www.allseas.com/en/what-we-do/projects/gippsland-epr> accessed 5 May 2026.

Stage 3: dismantling and recycling at Barry Beach Marine Terminal

Once brought onshore, ExxonMobil told the Committee that decommissioned infrastructure will be dismantled and recycled at the Barry Beach Marine Terminal. ExxonMobil had previously used the terminal as its main supply depot for offshore infrastructure for almost 60 years, and has already supported receiving 10,000 tonnes of steel and concrete.

ExxonMobil has engaged Gippsland-based contractor CMA Contracting to undertake the onshore dismantling of decommissioned structures. Richard Perry, Major Projects Manager at ExxonMobil, told the Committee that plans for onshore dismantling works have been modelled on similar works in Norway, which Mr Perry considers the 'gold standard'.[56] This workflow includes:

- the removal of hazardous waste externally from structures during preparation works
- the felling of structures on an impermeable membrane, to ensure any potentially hazardous liquids that escape from infrastructure, or run-off from rain, is captured
- felled structures are then dismantled by cranes and excavators, and loaded onto trucks for removal
- the treatment of all water from the site through an onsite wastewater treatment plant.[57]

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56 Richard Perry. *Transcript of evidence*, p. 46.

57 Ibid.

The Committee notes that Campaign 1 involves the removal and dismantling of the topsides and some undersea infrastructure for ExxonMobil's non-productive oil and gas infrastructure. ExxonMobil told the Committee that future plans for decommissioning, which include its remaining offshore platforms and other infrastructure, will be detailed in future campaigns.[58] ExxonMobil's Campaign 1 is discussed further in Chapter 4.

Box 2.2 Site visit to Barry Beach Marine Terminal

The Committee visited Barry Beach Marine Terminal in South Gippsland to learn more about where the oil and gas infrastructure from Campaign 1 will be transported and dismantled. This included a tour of the site and an explanation of where the laydown and dismantling areas will be and the protections in place to reduce environmental risks. The Committee thanks ExxonMobil for facilitating the visit to assist its work.

Figure 2.8 Environment and Planning Committee Members at Barry Beach Marine Terminal

Source: Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee.

2.5.2 Campaign 2

Campaign 1 will remove the topsides and the jackets of a number of oil and gas production facilities. However, there will be remaining infrastructure, most notably the pipelines that transport the oil and gas to shore. The decommissioning of this infrastructure will be the subject of Campaign 2.

58 Ibid., p. 50.

The pipelines in question may rest on the seabed, be partially buried or shallowly buried. Where the pipes cross the coastline they are buried to a deeper degree.

ExxonMobil informed the Committee that Campaign 2 is expected to begin in 2032.[59] The degree of the proposed removal of this infrastructure is yet to be decided. Concerns were raised by some stakeholders regarding the potential of contaminants that may be present in oil and gas pipelines that could be released into the environment if they were left in situ. This is discussed further in Chapter 3.

2.6 The regulatory framework for Victoria's oil and gas infrastructure

The regulatory environment surrounding the decommissioning of oil and gas infrastructure is complex.[60] This Section notes the regulatory framework, agencies and legislation that will be in place to guide the decommissioning process of infrastructure off Victoria's coast, noting a whole of lifecycle approach.

2.6.1 Agencies and agreements

Australia is a signatory to a number of international agreements which will inform standards set for the decommissioning processes in State and Commonwealth waters. These include:

- The London Convention and Protocol, which prohibits dumping of waste materials at sea.
- The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which establishes rules for all uses of the world's oceans, seas and their resources.
- The International Maritime Organisation Resolution A.672, which sets the guidelines and standards for the removal of offshore installations and structures. This includes the requirement for infrastructure to be removed to a minimum depth of 55 metres below sea level.
- The Basel Convention, which establishes rules for the control of transboundary movement of hazardous waste.
- The Minimata Convention on Mercury, which establishes binding rules around controlling mercury pollution caused by human activities.

The International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships.[61]

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59 Richard Perry, Major Projects Manager, Australia, ExxonMobil, presentation, supplementary evidence received 6 March 2026, p. 10.

60 Dr Francis Norman, Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director, Centre of Decommissioning Australia, public hearing, Melbourne, 10 December 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 30; Richard Perry, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 43–45; Andrew Lobb, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 58; Maritime Union of Australia, *Submission 156*, p. 8.

61 Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, responses to questions on notice received 10 February 2026, p. 4.

Table 2.4 notes all bodies and agencies that were identified in evidence presented to the Committee that will be at some point responsible for the decommissioning of Victoria's offshore oil and gas infrastructure.

Table 2.4 State and Commonwealth decommissioning regulatory bodies

Agency and regulatory framework	Agency role and responsibilities		
	Commonwealth waters	State waters	Onshore
Resources Victoria			
• *Petroleum Act 1998* • *Petroleum Regulations 2021*	N/A	N/A	Petroleum titles administration, resource, data and operational management that incorporates risk and environmental management and rehabilitation planning.
• *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2010* (Vic) • *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Regulations 2021* (Vic)	N/A	Offshore petroleum titles administration, resource and data management, and environmental management.	N/A
• *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2006* (Cth) • *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage (Resource Management and Administration) Regulations 2011* (Cth)	Decisions regarding offshore petroleum titles by the Victorian Minister for Energy and Resources, being a member of the Commonwealth-Victoria Offshore Petroleum Joint Authority.	N/A	N/A
Energy Infrastructure Regulator			
• *Pipelines Act 2005* • *Pipelines Regulations 2017*	N/A	N/A	Responsible for approvals and compliance of onshore pipeline decommissioning.
Circular Economy Division			
• *Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021* • *Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) (Risk, Consequence and Contingency Plans and Other Matters) Regulations 2023*	N/A	Supports government to embed circular economy principles and practices into government operations and policies.	
Conservation Regulator, Land and Biodiversity Policy Division			
• *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* • *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Regulations 2020*	N/A	Regulation of developments and activities to ensure consideration of biodiversity and protect threatened flora and fauna.	

Agency and regulatory framework	Agency role and responsibilities		
	Commonwealth waters	**State waters**	**Onshore**
• *Marine and Coastal Act 2018* • *Marine and Coastal (Prescribed Consents) Regulations 2025*	N/A	Strategic oversight for planning and management of the marine and coastal environment. Administration of Ministerial consent for the development or works on marine and coastal Crown land.	
Victorian Environment Protection Authority			
• *Environment Protection Act 2017* • *Environment Protection Regulations 2021*	N/A	Regulation of the management, transport and disposal of industrial waste and regulation of any activities in Victoria which may pose a risk of harm to Victorian waters and the environment through the general environmental duty. Licencing of oil and gas refining, and bulk storage, facilities and requirements for decommissioning plans.	
• *Pollution of Waters by Oil and Noxious Substances Act 1986* (Vic) • *Pollution of Waters by Oil and Noxious Substances Regulations 2022* (Vic)	N/A	Regulation of pollution from vessels applies to discharge into Victorian waters by ships involved in decommissioning activities.	N/A
WorkSafe			
• *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* • *Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2017*	N/A	N/A The Victorian *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2010* disapplies Victorian OHS laws in relation to petroleum activities in state waters. This responsibility has been conferred to NOPSEMA.	Regulation of workplace health and safety onshore.
• *Dangerous Goods Act 1985* • *Dangerous Goods (Storage and Handling) Regulations 2022*	N/A		Regulation of dangerous goods transport and handling in relation to onshore decommissioning work.
Energy Safe Victoria			
• *Gas Safety Act 1997* • *Gas Safety (Safety Case) Regulations 2018*	N/A	N/A	Regulates gas safety aspects of onshore pipeline decommissioning.
Recycling Victoria			
• *Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021* • *Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) (Risk, Consequence and Contingency Plans and Other Matters) Regulations 2023*	N/A	Strategic oversight of the waste and recycling sector.	

Agency and regulatory framework	Agency role and responsibilities		
	Commonwealth waters	State waters	Onshore
National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority (NOPSEMA)			
• *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2006* (Cth) • *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage (Resource Management and Administration) Regulations 2011* (Cth) • *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas (Safety) Regulations 2024* (Cth) • *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas (Environment) Regulations 2023* (Cth) • *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas (Regulatory Levies) Regulations 2022* (Cth)	Regulation of health and safety, structural integrity, and environmental management of petroleum operations and decommissioning in Commonwealth waters.	N/A	N/A
• *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2010* (Vic) • *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Regulations 2021* (Vic)	N/A	Regulation of health and safety, and structural integrity of petroleum infrastructure in state waters, as conferred by the Victorian Government.	N/A
• *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth)	Strategic assessment of the environmental management authorisation process for offshore oil and gas activities for offshore oil and gas activities.	N/A	N/A
National Offshore Petroleum Titles Administrator (NOPTA)			
• *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2006* (Cth) • *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage (Environment) Regulations 2023* (Cth) • *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage (Resource Management and Administration) Regulations 2011* (Cth)	Titles administration, data management and resource management, and provision of technical advice to the Joint Authority, in relation to titles in Commonwealth waters.	N/A	N/A

Agency and regulatory framework	Agency role and responsibilities		
	Commonwealth waters	State waters	Onshore
Commonwealth Department of Industry, Science and Resources			
• *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2006* (Cth) • *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage (Resource Management and Administration) Regulations 2011* (Cth)	Decisions regarding offshore petroleum titles by the Commonwealth Minister for Energy and Resources, being a member of the Commonwealth-Victoria Offshore Petroleum Joint Authority.	N/A	N/A
Department of Transport and Planning			
• *Environment Effects Act 1978* • *Ministerial Guidelines for Assesment of Environmental Effects 2023*	N/A	Environmental impact assessment of proposed projects that may pose a significant impact on the environment.	
• *Planning and Environment Act 1987* • *Planning and Environment Regulations 2015*	N/A	Shared responsibility with local councils for planning permission and controls.	
Safe Transport Victoria			
• *Marine Safety Act 2012* • *Marine Safety Regulations 2023*	N/A	Permissions for and regulation of maritime transport, including for decommissioned materials.	N/A
Department of Health – radiation unit			
• *Dangerous Goods Act 1985*	N/A	Regulation of activities involving radioactive materials.	

Source: Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, responses to questions on notice received 10 February 2026, pp. 8–11; Sam Jenkin, Chief Health and Safety Officer, WorkSafe Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 29.

2.6.2 The legislative framework for decomissioning

The Commonwealth and State's *Offshore and Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Acts* (OPGGS (Cth) and (Vic)) are the primary acts under which offshore decommissioning is regulated. Evidence noted that the State framework that governs decommissioning broadly mirrors Commonwealth legislation, policies and guidelines on decommissioning.[62]DEECA told the Committee that the mirroring acts to support two key agreements between Commonwealth and State Ministers:

- The Offshore Constitutional Settlement, under which Ministers have agreed to maintain regulatory alignment and compatibility of offshore legislation across jurisdictions.

62 Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, responses to questions on notice received 10 February 2026, pp. 4–5.

- The conferral of State authority over health and safety and well integrity of oil and gas infrastructure in State waters to NOPSEMA.[63]

The Commonwealth Act establishes several significant requirements relevant to decommissioning, which have been mirrored by State legislation, including:

- that a titleholder must remove its infrastructure associated with petroleum activities when no longer in use[64]
- that a titleholder must maintain and repair all infrastructure that are in use for petroleum production[65]
- that a Minister may give direction to a current or former titleholder of a site to do any of the following:
  - remove any property brought into the title area
  - plug off or close all wells in the area, to the satisfaction of the Minister
  - provide for the conservation and protection of natural resources in the area, to the satisfaction of the Minister
  - make good any damage to the seabed or subsoil[66]
- the expectation that a titleholder must at all times maintain financial assurance sufficient to meet all liabilities arising from petroleum activities, including decommissioning.[67]

Section 621 of the *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2010* (Vic) creates the legislative requirement to undertake decommissioning:

> A titleholder... must remove from the title area... all structures that are, and all equipment and other property that is, neither used nor to be used in connection with the operations—
>
> (a) in which the titleholder is or will be engaged; and
>
> (b) that are authorised by the permit, lease, licence or authority.[68]

This Section mirrors Section 572(3) of the Commonwealth legislation, which sets the same requirement within Commonwealth waters.[69] This Section creates the expectation that the removal of all infrastructure associated with oil and gas activities is the 'base case' for decommissioning.[70]

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63 Ibid.

64 *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2010* (Vic) s 572(3).

65 *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2010* (Vic) s 572(5).

66 *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2010* (Vic) s 634–8.

67 *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2010* (Vic) s 571.

68 *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2010* (Vic) s 621.

69 *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2006* (Cth) s 572.

70 Department of Industry, Science and Resources, *Guideline: Offshore petroleum decommissioning*, p. 5.

The Committee heard that while there is a general expectation for operators to remove all infrastructure associated with oil and gas production, there is opportunity for titleholders to leave some infrastructure in situ.[71] A guide to decommissioning offshore petroleum infrastructure released by the DISR (Cth) notes that:

> Options other than complete removal may be considered, however the titleholder must demonstrate that the alternative decommissioning approach delivers equal or better environmental outcomes compared to complete removal ...[72]

NOPSEMA is the Agency responsible for determining whether alternatives to complete removal provide those equal or better outcomes.[73]

More directly, NOPSEMA is the Commonwealth regulator for offshore petroleum activities, and it can issue a General Direction to an operator of a petroleum lease to undertake decommissioning. An operator who receives a General Direction to undertake decommissioning commits an offence if they fail to comply with or breach the conditions of the direction.[74]

NOPSEMA issued ExxonMobil with a General Direction to undertake decommissioning works on its assets in the Bass Strait on 20 April 2021, directing these works to be completed no later than 30 September 2027.[75]

The Commonwealth further legislates the establishment of a trailing liability for the elimination of leaks, the clean up of any leaks and monitoring of their impact. If titleholders fail to do so, the Commonwealth Government and NOPSEMA may undertake clean up and must be reimbursed by the titleholder. The same applies for the Victorian Government and Victorian agencies in State waters.[76] These costs are recoverable in court.

Once decommissioning has been completed, the Joint Authority, comprised of the responsible State and Commonwealth Ministers, is responsible for determining whether decommissioning has been undertaken to a sufficient extent. The Joint Authority is responsible for the final decision to approve or deny a titleholder's surrender of lease.[77] The Joint Authority is further discussed in Section 3.2.

2.6.3 Local stakeholders

Evidence noted that local stakeholders, including local councils, port authorities and traditional owner groups that are located within areas that decommissioning will take place, will play a role in regulating decommissioning in Victoria. Mayor Nathan Hersey

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71 Ibid, pp. 8–9.

72 Ibid, p. 9.

73 Ibid.

74 NOPSEMA, *General direction 817*, 20 March 2021, <https://www.nopsema.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-06/A783674.pdf> accessed 4 May 2025.

75 Ibid.

76 *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2010* (Vic) s 626.

77 *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2010* (Vic) s 57.

of the South Gippsland Shire Council told the Committee that council's responsibility in the decommissioning process consists of approving the planning permit for onshore activities.[78] In particular, this relates to the planned recovery and dismantling of infrastructure onshore necessary during decommissioning. For ExxonMobil's planned decommissioning, these activities include:

- Approval of planning permits for dismantling at Barry Beach Marine Terminal in South Gippsland Council
- Approval of planning permits for activities related to pipelines onshore in the Wellington Shire Council area.[79]

The Committee also heard that local Port Authorities will also play a role in the regulation of offshore decommissioning and be responsible for safety and pollution control for vessels carrying decommissioned materials into port. Chris Waites, Chief Executive Officer of Gippsland Ports, noted that control of invasive species and other pollution from potentially contaminated infrastructure coming into port as areas of particular regulatory focus.[80] Chris Waites told the Committee that while weather conditions had the potential to create hazardous conditions, Gippsland Ports is confident that decommissioning activities undertaken in the port will be undertaken safely.[81]

The Committee also heard that Traditional Owner groups have responsibilities for Country and Sea Country, which oil and gas decommissioning activities may affect. The Committee heard that both the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation and the Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation will hold responsibilities for the decommissioning of infrastructure in the Bass Strait.[82] These responsibilities include the joint management of lands and waters with the State Government, with the stated aims of:

- benefitting Traditional Owner groups by recognising, valuing, promoting and incorporating their culture, knowledge, skills and decision-making processes
- benefitting the community needs of all Victorians and visitors for public education and enjoyment through quality experiences, services and information
- conserving, protecting and enhancing natural and cultural values
- enjoying widespread community support
- ensuring the well-being of country and the wellbeing of people.[83]

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78 Cr Nathan Hersey, Mayor, South Gippsland Shire Council, public hearing, Leongatha, 11 February 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 23.

79 Ibid., pp. 23, 28.

80 Chris Waites, Chief Executive Officer, Gippsland Ports, public hearing, Leongatha, 11 February 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 11–12.

81 Ibid.

82 Cr Nathan Hersey, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 20.

83 Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation, *Joint Management*, 2026, <https://gunaikurnai.org/our-country/joint-management> accessed 4 May 2026.

Chapter 3
Decommissioning infrastructure offshore

3.1 Introduction

As noted in Section 2.2.2, all offshore oil and gas production platforms off Victoria's coast are located in Commonwealth waters. A small minority of offshore oil and gas infrastructure is located in the State's jurisdiction, consisting of 78km of pipeline (representing 14 pipeline licences) and 5 wells.[1]

Commonwealth policy, legislation and regulation will apply to the majority of the platforms undergoing decommissioning as most of the infrastructure is located in Commonwealth waters. Victoria's role in determining decommissioning outcomes for offshore infrastructure is therefore limited by its jurisdiction.

As previously noted, the State Government has conferred its regulatory responsibility for health and safety, and for the structural integrity of infrastructure in State waters to the National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority (NOPSEMA) (see Section 2.6.1). Although possible under legislation, Victoria has not conferred its environmental management functions to NOPSEMA.[2] As such, Victoria remains responsible only for regulating the environmental management of infrastructure in State waters.

Consequently, the jurisdictional boundaries assign considerable responsibility to the Commonwealth Government in overseeing Victoria's offshore decommissioning process. The Committee consistently heard from stakeholders that Commonwealth legislation, policy and actors will be highly influential in shaping outcomes for Victoria's decommissioning industry.[3]

3.2 The regulatory environment in Commonwealth waters

NOPSEMA is Australia's independent regulator for the offshore energy industry, as established under the *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2006* (Cth)

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1 Department of Energy, the Environment and Climate Action, responses to questions on notice received 10 February 2026, p. 12.

2 NOPSEMA, *Submission 24*, p. 2.

3 Professor Tina-Soliman Hunter, Energy and Resources Law, Macquarie Law School, Macquarie University, public hearing, Melbourne, 10 December 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 9; Fern Cadman, Fossil Fuel Industry Campaigner, Wilderness Society, public hearing, Melbourne, 10 December 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 21; Angie Moore, Policy Analyst, Oil and Gas Decommissioning, Maritime Union of Australia, Victoria Branch, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 3.

(The OPGGS Act (Cth)).[4] Its role includes the oversight of occupational health and safety, structural integrity and environmental management of all offshore petroleum and greenhouse gas storage activities, including decommissioning, in Commonwealth waters.[5]

NOPSEMA's functions include:

- to develop and implement effective monitoring and enforcement strategies to secure compliance by persons with their obligations under the OPGGS Act and regulations, structural integrity law and environmental management law
- to investigate accidents, occurrences and circumstances that affect, or have the potential to affect, occupational health and safety and involve, or may involve, deficiencies in structural integrity or deficiencies in environmental management
- to provide information, assessments, analysis, reports, advice and recommendations when requested by the responsible Commonwealth Minister in relation to the Minister performing functions or exercising powers in relation to offshore greenhouse gas storage operations.[6]

NOPSEMA regulates offshore decommissioning activities through the Commonwealth decommissioning framework and the OPGGS Act (see Section 2.6.1).[7] NOPSEMA's submission explained that guiding decommissioning concepts, 'reflected in the framework and the OPGGS Act' consist of:

- titleholders are responsible for decommissioning
- decommissioning demands early planning.
- 'Removal of all property is the "base case"—noting alternative end state options may be accepted'.[8]
- seeking joint authority consent to surrender the title once decommissioning is finished.[9]

NOPSEMA's *2024–2029 Decommissioning Compliance Strategy,* also outlines the actions NOPSEMA will take to achieve its vision for decommissioning all petroleum wells, structures, equipment and property in Commonwealth waters.[10]

The National Offshore Petroleum Titles Administrator (NOPTA) is the body responsible for approving variations of title, including surrender of title, in Commonwealth waters. In the consideration of the surrender of an operator's lease, NOPTA will seek advice from NOPSEMA on whether a duty holder has met its obligations under legislation. This includes making good any damage to the seabed and ensuring wells are plugged

4 NOPSEMA, *Submission 24*, p. 2.

5 Sue McCarrey, Chief Executive Officer, NOPSEMA, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 64.

6 NOPSEMA, *Submission 24*, pp. 2–3.

7 Ibid, p. 4.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 NOPSEMA, *Decommissioning Compliance Strategy 2024 – 2029*, November 2023, p. 2.

to a satisfactory level.[11] NOPSEMA may also provide advice to the State Minister as a member of the Joint Authority (see Section 2.6.1).

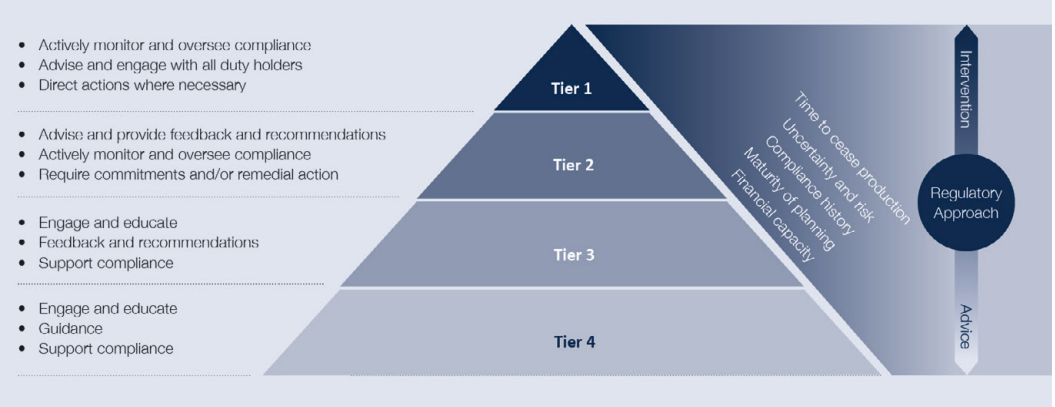
Stakeholders also identified the Commonwealth Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) as an important regulatory body in offshore decommissioning. The Department has responsibilities in regulating sea dumping and in overseeing administration for artificial reefs.[12]

3.3 NOPSEMA applies a 'risk-based regulatory approach' to offshore decommissioning activities

The Committee heard that NOPSEMA applies a 'risk-based regulatory approach' to its offshore decommissioning operations.[13] Under this approach the regulator assesses titleholders' decommissioning plans and activities to decide if risks 'have been appropriately identified and will be managed to levels that are as low as reasonably practicable (ALARP)'.[14]

NOPSEMA's *2024–2029 Decommissioning Compliance Strategy* notes that the regulator 'uses a risk-based, tiered approach to regulate decommissioning … to prioritise resources and guide its compliance approach'.[15] Figure 3.1 shows the tiered approach that NOPSEMA uses as part of its Strategy.

Figure 3.1 NOPSEMA uses a risk-based, tiered approach to regulate decommissioning



Source: NOPSEMA, *Decommissioning Compliance Strategy 2024–2029*, p. 6.

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11 David Christensen, Executive Director, Development and Decommissioning, NOPSEMA, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 66.

12 Jason Medd, Director, Offshore Decommissioning, Australian Energy Producers, public hearing, Melbourne, 10 December 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 14; Stanley Woodhouse, Offshore Fossil Fuel Campaigner, Friends of the Earth Melbourne, public hearing, 10 December 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 23; Dr Francis Norman, Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director, Centre of Decommissioning Australia, public hearing, Melbourne, 10 December 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 31.

13 Sue McCarrey, Chief Executive Officer, National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 64.

14 NOPSEMA, *Submission 24*, p. 4.

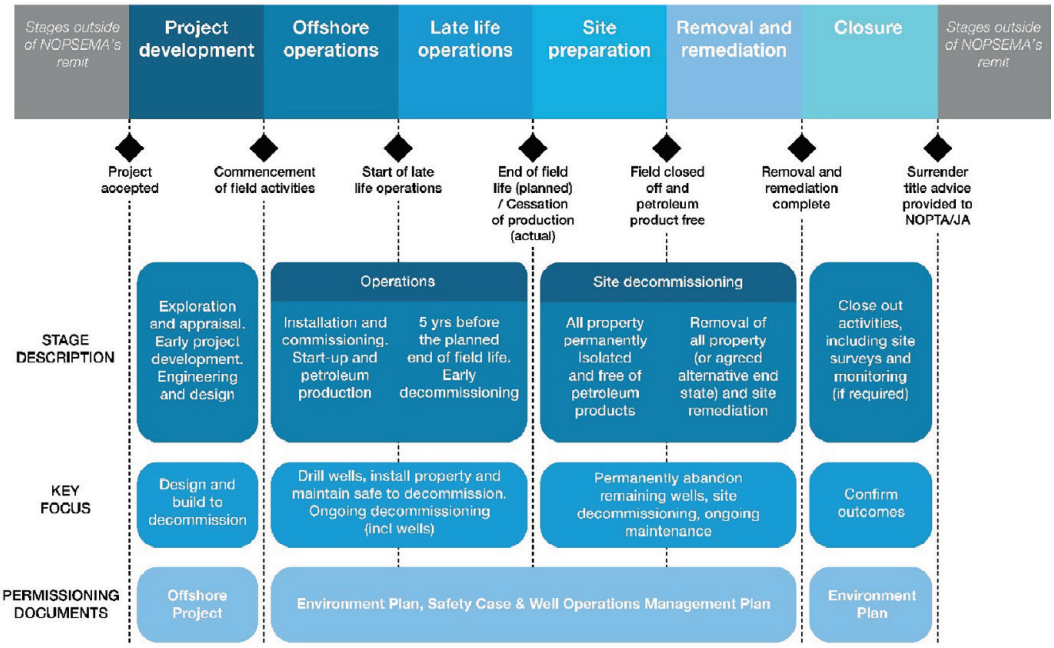
15 NOPSEMA, *Decommissioning Compliance Strategy 2024–2029*, p. 6.

NOPSEMA explained that it uses various monitoring, compliance and enforcement measures to regulate titleholders and ensure their decommissioning outcomes meet the principle of ALARP. This includes assessments of permissioning documents and investigations.[16]

Permissioning documents are official regulatory submissions that titleholders must submit under the OPGGS Act (Cth), which 'include appropriate information on decommissioning … at all stages of the life cycle of the petroleum project'.[17] NOPSEMA explained that operators submit permissioning documents across all areas where it has regulatory oversight.

Figure 3.2 shows 'decommissioning over the life cycle of an oil and gas project', highlighting where relevant permissioning documents are required across decommissioning stages.[18]

Figure 3.2 NOPSEMA's regulatory oversight across the oil and gas project lifecycle and associated permissioning documents



Source: NOPSEMA, *Submission 24,* p. 5.

In assessing permissioning documents for decommissioning activities, NOPSEMA will ensure that impacts and risk have been appropriately identified, managed and are in line with ALARP.[19] NOPSEMA may choose to:

- accept permissioning documents

16 NOPSEMA, *Submission 24*, pp. 4, 8, 10.

17 Ibid., p. 5.

18 Ibid.

19 NOPSEMA, *Submission 24*, p. 4; Sue McCarrey, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 63.

- request a variation of permissioning documents
- reject permissioning documents.[20]

NOPSEMA outlined 'three key permissioning documents … relevant to decommissioning' as:

- Environment Plans
- Well Operations Management Plans
- Safety Cases.[21]

Titleholders submit environment plans to NOPSEMA to outline 'arrangements in relation to property decommissioning activities and management of associated environmental impacts and risks'.[22]

Titleholders submit Well Operations Management Plans (WOMP) which describe the long-term management arrangements that will be in place for the permanent abandonment of wells. Once accepted, a WOMP must remain in place until that well has been permanently abandoned and NOPSEMA are satisfied with the written report of the abandonment process.[23] WOMPs are discussed further in Section 3.4.1.

Safety cases are required until decommissioning activities are finished, 'and the facility no longer exists'.[24] They outline the occupational health and safety risks associated with operations or works conducted during the decommissioning process.[25]

Evidence noted that permissioning documents are required to be re-submitted to NOPSEMA every five years. This allows a mechanism for NOPSEMA to ensure that risk management arrangements continue to be appropriate as fields may mature, allowing NOPSEMA to continually reduce risk.[26]

At the time of writing, NOPSEMA has assessed 30 in-force decommissioning related environment plans and has issued 13 decommissioning related General Directions to ensure compliance with legislative obligations. It has also overseen the plugging and abandonment of 324 wells over the past five years (2021–2025), including 203 wells across the Bass Strait.[27]

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20 Sue McCarrey, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 70.

21 NOPSEMA, *Submission 24*, p. 5.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid, p. 6.

25 Ibid.

26 David Christensen, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 64.

27 NOPSEMA, *Submission 24*, p. 7.

NOPSEMA has the ability to take enforcement action to deter noncompliance.[28] The Committee heard that enforcement is primarily achieved through issuing notices and directions to a titleholder.[29] These include:

- an improvement notice, which may be issued when NOPSEMA believes the duty holder is contravening legislation and is creating a risk to health and safety of a person or a threat to the environment
- a general, significant incident or remedial direction, which requires a titleholder to undertake some activity to enforce compliance with legislation.
- a prohibition notice, which may be issued when a NOPSEMA inspector is satisfied there is an immediate threat to human or environmental safety, and stops a duty holder from continuing their activity.[30]

At time of writing, NOPSEMA has three active improvement notices for oil and gas infrastructure in the Bass Strait, having issued 5 further notices to ExxonMobil since July 2024, all of which have been complied with.[31]

Chief Executive Officer of NOPSEMA, Sue McCarrey, argued that 'one of the advantages' of the regulatory approach to decommissioning is that it produces 'an outcomes-based regulatory regime'.[32] Sue McCarrey explained that risk levels 'can change over time' and the approach allows the regulator to 'shift [their] stance … should [they] need to' in how works are carried out, while still ensuring that outcomes are met.[33]

The Committee heard that the regulatory approach enables NOSPEMA to reflect evolving developments in international best practice for well integrity and to implement new technologies, such as improved environmental risk detection.[34] Sue McCarrey provided detail to the Committee:

> as new technologies become available, as research indicates a better way to undertake decommissioning or any other offshore activity, it means that our viewpoint changes as a result, because it is an outcomes-focused regulatory regime.[35]

In addition, NOPSEMA's submission noted that:

> There is no 'one size fits all' approach to decommissioning. The nature and complexity of property varies considerably between projects and when combined with the safety, environment, economic and technical considerations, mean that decommissioning each

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28 Sue McCarrey, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 63.

29 Ibid, pp. 69–70.

30 Sue McCarrey, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 63, 69–70; NOPSEMA, *Submission 24*, p. 10.

31 NOPSEMA, *Published directions and notices*, 2026, <https://www.nopsema.gov.au/offshore-industry/directions-notices-and-alerts/published-directions-and-notices> accessed 5 May 2026.

32 Sue McCarrey, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 63.

33 Ibid, p. 64.

34 Ibid, p. 65.

35 Ibid, pp. 63–64.

> well and piece of property will have its own unique challenges. Decommissioning plans and programs should be developed to suit the specific circumstances of the petroleum project.[36]

A variety of stakeholders, including industry, academics and individuals, agreed that NOPSEMA's flexibility in enforcing regulations is necessary.[37] Offshore decommissioning works need to be assessed on a case by case basis as structures and environments across sites vary in conditions and characteristics, which create unique workplace and environmental risks.[38] Professor Tina-Soliman Hunter gave the example of decommissioning pipelines, whose unique location, level of corrosion and contaminant profile will create differing best case decommissioning scenarios.[39]

Other stakeholders such as unions, environmental groups and local residents, expressed concern about employing a flexible approach to decommissioning. These stakeholders argued that a stringent, consistent approach to regulation is necessary to ensure that operators do not deviate from full and effective decommissioning.[40]

One concern in particular is the flexibility around the extent to which decommissioned infrastructure is removed.[41] Stanley Woodhouse, Offshore Fossil Fuel Campaigner from Friends of the Earth Melbourne, noted this potential ambiguity as a potential 'loophole' to full and responsible decommissioning.[42] This is discussed further in Section 3.4.2.

3.4 Concerns about the regulatory approach to offshore decommissioning

Throughout the Inquiry, stakeholders raised concerns with the Committee about the regulatory and legislative framework (both State and Commonwealth) underpinning offshore decommissioning in the context of:

- well integrity and oversight
- leaving infrastructure in situ
- financial assurances for decommissioning
- contaminants within production and transport infrastructure
- degrading infrastructure
- the effectiveness of regulations in protecting the environment.

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36 NOPSEMA, *Submission 24*, p. 4.

37 Professor Tina-Soliman Hunter, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 4–6; Anda Banikos, public hearing, Leongatha, 11 February 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 36; Simon Boag, Executive Officer, South East Trawl Fishing Industry Association, public hearing, Leongatha, 11 February 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 39.

38 Ibid.

39 Professor Tina-Soliman Hunter, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 6.

40 Stanley Woodhouse, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 20; Nola Kelly, public hearing, Leongatha, 11 February 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 31; Angie Moore, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2; Friends of the Earth Melbourne, *Submission 105*, p. 3; Victorian Trades Hall Council, *Submission 138*, p. 3; The Wilderness Society, *Submission 148*, p. 7.

41 Stanley Woodhouse, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 20; Angie Moore, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 3.

42 Angie Moore, Transcript of evidence, p. 3; Friends of the Earth Melbourne, *Submission 105*, p. 3.

The following sections describe regulatory concerns that apply across both State and Commonwealth jurisdiction. As noted in Chapter 2, while Victoria does not have jurisdiction over activities undertaken in Commonwealth waters, many of the issues outlined in this section have the potential to directly impact Victoria.

3.4.1 Well integrity and oversight

Stakeholders expressed concern about the regulatory arrangements for the inspection and monitoring of decommissioned wells.[43] This included significant concern about the lack of ongoing monitoring of wells once they have been abandoned and their lease surrendered.[44] The Committee heard that these concerns stem from NOPSEMA's assessment of WOMPs, which assess the effectiveness of well decommissioning based on an operator's written description, rather than an investigation undertaken by the regulator.

Stakeholders called on NOPSEMA to undertake post-decommissioning inspections of wells, engage third parties to undertake regular monitoring of wells, and use satellite imaging to monitor leaks.[45]

Zavier Evans, a local Gippsland resident, described this issue as an 'honour system', where duty holders are required to report their own leakages as opposed to NOPSEMA investigating and reporting potential leaks.[46] He noted the disincentive for companies to report leaks:

> Companies can either report the extra pollution, which comes with bad PR and very occasionally a fine, or they can not say anything and just let that gas wander off into the surrounding area and keep their money.[47]

Professor Tina Soliman-Hunter, Professor of Energy and Resources Law at Macquarie, noted that Australia's well integrity assessment process is unique and is the only jurisdiction that does not implement some form of inspection or independent monitoring of wells.[48] Professor Soliman-Hunter described this as a key deficiency in Australian legislation, and argued that certification that a well has been plugged and abandoned to the best of an operator's ability should be a condition of a WOMP.[49]

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43 Professor Tina Soliman-Hunter, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 2–3; Zavier Evans, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 37–38; Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis, *Submission 134*, p. 8; The Wilderness Society, *Submission 148*, pp. 4–5; Maritime Union of Australia, *Submission 156*, pp. 18–20.

44 Professor Tina Soliman-Hunter, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 3; Anda Banikos, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 29–30; Zavier Evans, public hearing, Leongatha, 11 February 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 31–32.

45 Professor Tina Soliman-Hunter, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 3; Zavier Evans, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 31; Angie Moore, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 2–3; Robin Gardner, *Submission 36*, p. 1; Marnie Brooks, *Submission 109*, p. 1; Maritime Union of Australia, *Submission 156*, p. 20.

46 Zavier Evans, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 31.

47 Ibid.

48 Professor Tina Soliman-Hunter, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 3.

49 Ibid.

Leaks from orphaned wells, where a well has been abandoned and has no responsible operator, was also a concern.[50] CODA told the Committee in its submission:

> Orphan wells... are often one of the highest sources of emissions since they can be poorly maintained and lack records, and the state who own them may not be appropriately funded to undertake their closure.[51]

The lack of inspection to confirm the successful plugging and abandonment of wells compounds the risks associated with orphaned wells.

The Committee heard that the potential for wells to leak stems from the quality of the plugging and abandonment (P&A) process.[52] The P&A process involves:

- removing all remaining hydrocarbons from the well
- transporting all remaining hydrocarbons through pipelines from the well
- permanently sealing off the well, ensuring that any fluids remaining cannot escape.[53]

Professor Soliman-Hunter told the Committee that 'A well should not, will not and cannot leak if it has been plugged and abandoned correctly'.[54]

The Committee heard that if P&A processes are carried out to a poor standard, the lack of monitoring and direct accountability would make future leaks difficult to both detect and rectify.[55] Stakeholders noted risks including the ongoing leaking of oil and gas, as well as the potential release of other contaminants, including Naturally Occurring Radioactive Materials (NORMS) and mercury. [56]

State and Commonwealth regulators told the Committee that mechanisms exist to ensure that accountability for wells remains with duty holders past the point of surrender of lease.[57] This includes trailing liability legislation and the General Environmental Duty, which are further discussed in Section 3.7.1.[58]

Sue McCarrey told the Committee that wells have been a major focus of their operations and will continue to be.[59] She noted that NOPSEMA considers redundant wells a national priority, and that the organisation continually improves its well

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50 Dr Francis Norman, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 31.

51 Centre for Decommissioning Australia, *Submission 34,* p. 11.

52 Professor Tina Soliman-Hunter, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 4.

53 Maritime Union of Australia, *Submission 156.2*, p. 7.

54 Professor Tina Soliman-Hunter, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 5.

55 Ibid, p. 6.

56 Ibid, p. 4; Fern Cadman, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 23; Stanley Woodhouse, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 20; Anda Banikos, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 36–37; Zavier Evans, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 31; Carly Dober, *Submission 33*, p. 7; Zavier Evans, *Submission 133*, p. 1; The Wilderness Society, *Submission 148*, p. 7; Doctors for the Environment, *Submission 155*, pp. 2–3; Maritime Union of Australia, *Submission 156*, p. 10; Greenpeace, *Submission 159*, pp. 2–3.

57 Dan Hunt, Director Regional Victoria, Operations Division, Environment Protection Authority Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 24; Linda Bibby, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 33; David Christensen, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 65.

58 Dan Hunt, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 25; Sue McCarrey, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 71.

59 Sue McCarrey, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 64.

assessment and oversight practices to ensure that non-producing wells remain appropriately decommissioned.[60]

The Committee notes the recent amendments to the *Offshore legislation under the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage (Resource Management and Administration) Regulations 2025* (Cth), which make changes to well integrity reporting and WOMP requirements.[61] While it is not yet clear how these will impact concerns raised by stakeholders, the Committee notes that they aim to address concerns around well inspection and monitoring.

Concerns were raised about well integrity and monitoring regulation, including the potential for environmental harm associated with undetected well leaks, including from orphaned wells.

FINDING 2: Australia's offshore petroleum system mainly relies on information provided by companies to assess whether wells have been properly decommissioned, with oversight from NOPSEMA. It does not require routine independent checks or regular ongoing monitoring of wells after they have been abandoned.

3.4.2 Leaving infrastructure in situ

As discussed in Section 2.6, both Commonwealth and State legislation sets full removal as the base case for offshore oil and gas infrastructure decommissioning. However, alternative approaches may be considered if the titleholder can demonstrate that it provides 'equal or better environmental outcomes'.[62] These considerations can only be applied to infrastructure below 55 metres below sea level. All infrastructure above 55 metres below sea level must be removed without exception. This is in line with the International Maritime Organisation's resolution on marine navigation, which Australia is a signatory to.[63]

A number of stakeholders, including some local residents of Gippsland, argued that decommissioned oil and gas infrastructure should undergo full removal.[64] These stakeholders cited the following reasons for the full removal of infrastructure:

- The economic benefit that receiving all ferrous, concrete and other materials provides to workforce and industry (see Chapter 5).

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60 Ibid.

61 NOPSEMA, *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage (Resource Management and Administration) Regulations*, 15 April 2026, <https://www.nopsema.gov.au/offshore-industry/well-integrity/offshore-petroleum-and-greenhouse-gas-storage-resource-management> accessed 16 April 2026.

62 Department of Industry, Science and Resources, *Australia's offshore resources decommissioning roadmap*, December 2024, p. 9.

63 Dr Francis Norman, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 33.

64 Fern Cadman, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 24; Danae Bosler, Assistant Secretary, Victorian Trades Hall Council, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 1; Angie Moore, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2; Lakes Entrance Fishermen's Co-Op, *Submission 29*, p. 1; SEFTIA and SSIA, *Submission 32*, p. 5; Ken Wilson, *Submission 38*, p. 1; Peter Wilkinson, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 40; Ron Hurst, *Submission 43*, p. 1; Lauri Widdup, *Submission 58*, p. 1; Russel Baader, *Submission 60*, p. 1; Liane Gibson, *Submission 67*, p. 2; Jason Alexander, *Submission 68*, p. 1; Richard Whitfield, *Submission 70*, p. 1; Regina Bos, *Submission 99*, p. 1; Friends of the Earth Melbourne, *Submission 105*, p. 3; Greenpeace, *Submission 159*, p. 6.

- The environmental risk posed by leaving contaminated infrastructure and pipelines in perpetuity.[65]
- Infrastructure left on the seabed could be hazardous to the fishing industry, including trawlers and other vessels operating close to the seabed.[66]

The Committee heard from academics, environmental organisations and local residents that the flexibility instilled in the regulatory approach to leaving infrastructure in situ is a potential area of weakness in the legislation. They believed that infrastructure that is allowed to remain in situ poses risk to the environment, businesses and the community. It also represents missed economic and environmental opportunities to recycle the materials.[67]

In particular, stakeholders noted the risk of contaminants found in oil and gas infrastructure entering the marine environment as a key concern of leaving infrastructure in situ. In its submission to the Committee, the Maritime Union of Australia expressed that 'infrastructure awaiting decommissioning off Victoria's coast is not only extensive but toxic, degraded and environmentally hazardous'.[68] The submission expressed that infrastructure 'comprises the full material spectrum of the petroleum era', such as:

- 'Asbestos
- radioactive materials
- contaminated sediment
- hazardous residues
- mercury-bearing compounds
- residual hydrocarbons
- plastics
- degraded polymers
- synthetic oils
- heavy metals'.[69]

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65 Stanley Woodhouse, *Transcript of evidence*, p.25; Fern Cadman, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 25; Anda Banikos, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 37; Zavier Evans, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 37.

66 Lakes Entrance Fisherman's Co-Op, *Submission 29*, p. 2; SEFTIA and SSIA, *Submission 32*, p. 3.

67 Stanley Woodhouse, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 24; Kevin Morrison, Energy Finance Analyst, Australian Gas, Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis, public hearing, Melbourne, 10 December 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 43.

68 Maritime Union of Australia, *Submission 156*, p. 9.

69 Ibid.

The Committee heard concerns from stakeholders, including residents from Gippsland, about the potential for these contaminants to harm local ecosystems, including those near to Gippsland such as the RAMSAR listed wetlands.[70]

There was also concern about the impact of these contaminants on marine life, and the capacity for these contaminants to persist and accumulate in the environment where they be consumed by animals and enter the human food chain.[71]

The Committee heard evidence from Dr Tom Cresswell, a researcher at the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO) whose research has focused on contaminants in offshore oil and gas infrastructure. Dr Tom Cresswell told the Committee that while a number of contaminants exist on the exterior of pipelines, including plastic coating systems to prevent corrosion, the most harmful contaminants, including mercury and NORMs, exist within pipelines.[72] These materials may build up on some pipelines, and could enter the environment when the pipelines corrode, if they are left in situ.[73]

Dr Tom Cresswell told the Committee that assessing the risk from contaminated infrastructure is complex. In particular, research of effects of mercury and NORMs on the food chain and the ability to determine whether pipelines have been sufficiently cleaned from materials are areas that need further research.[74]

Dr Tom Creswell noted that due to the differing nature of pipelines in terms of construction and contaminant profile, approvals to fully remove pipeline infrastructure need to be determined on a case by case basis.[75] A range of factors, including the unique contaminant profile of a pipeline, environmental risk of cutting and transporting pipelines and the risk of corrosion of pipelines should be taken into account when considering risk profiles.[76] The current estimates place pipeline corrosion as occurring between 200 – 400 years, primarily dependent on how a pipeline has been coated.[77]

Professor Tina Soliman-Hunter noted burying pipelines as a favoured option, if removal is not possible. Professor Soliman-Hunter told the Committee that covering pipelines in silt to 'cement them in' will ensure that pipelines are set in the seabed and provide some protection for the marine environment from potential degradation and contaminant leaks.[78]

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70 Professor Tina Soliman-Hunter, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 4; Stanley Woodhouse, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 20; Chris Waites, Chief Executive Officer, Gippsland Ports, public hearing, Leongatha, 11 February 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 14; Ron Hurst, *Submission 43*, p. 1; Tom Knowles, *Submission 46*, p. 1; Friends of the Earth Melbourne, *Submission 105*, p. 3; Maxine Andrews, *Submission 119*, p. 1.

71 Stanley Woodhouse, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 20; Anda Banikos, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 37.

72 Dr Tom Cresswell, Researcher, Ecotoxicology and Radioecology, Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 13.

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid, p. 15.

75 Ibid, p. 16.

76 Ibid.

77 Ibid, p. 14.

78 Professor Tina Soliman-Hunter, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 5.

Stakeholders argued that oil and gas companies favour approaches that allow infrastructure to remain in situ due to the high cost and complexity associated with full removal of deep sea infrastructure.[79] While noting the complexity of the task of decommissioning, the Committee heard that decommissioning was a task that companies could complete with appropriate planning, funds and employment of skills.[80]

Stanley Woodhouse told the Committee that, with respect to decommissioning, 'almost anything can be done, you just have to be prepared to pay for it and use the right tools'.[81] Oil and gas decommissioning policy analyst for Maritime Union of Australia, Victoria Branch, Angie Moore told the Committee:

> What we do know is that decommissioning is one of the most dangerous, hazardous things that you can do, full stop. That does not mean it cannot be done safely. It just may take a little bit more time, consideration, effort and sometimes money, but it is a cost of actually operating an offshore oil and gas facility. Companies actually had to have a plan in their head and have some finances put aside to get approval to start in the first place, so we cannot accept the complaints of 'It's too hard and it's too costly', because there was never an occasion for that.[82]

Stakeholders expressed concern about titleholders arguing for in situ approaches on the basis it is more beneficial for the environment, particularly to the marine environments which have developed around infrastructure.

The Committee heard concerns from local residents of Gippsland that leaving infrastructure, specifically pipelines, in situ would have the potential to cause greater damage to the marine environment than full removal.[83] Nola Kelly told the Committee, 'I cannot see why pipelines would not be removed… pipelines do not [create marine environments], and they have the capacity to erode'.[84]

Angie Moore reflected doubts about the ability for oil and gas infrastructure to provide marine habitats:

> It would be great if the fish and the sea life did actually enjoy it and thrived, but I do not think the companies are doing this out of pure altruism, and they certainly did not set off in the industry to create better habitats for fish, I think that is fair to say… So when the law states that everything should come out and when we stand to benefit economically and socially from removing everything, it is just a very straightforward proposition.[85]

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79 Fern Cadman, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 24–25; Stanley Woodhouse, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 25; Zavier Evans, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 37–38.

80 Angie Moore, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 7.

81 Stanley Woodhouse, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 25.

82 Angie Moore, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 7.

83 Nola Kelly, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 31; Zavier Evans, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 32.

84 Nola Kelly, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 32.

85 Angie Moore, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 3.

The Committee notes ExxonMobil's March 2026 information bulletin, which proposes leaving up to 10 of its lower steel piled jackets and ancillary subsea property in situ as part of its Bass Strait decommissioning Campaign 1.[86] The bulletin suggests that leaving this infrastructure in situ represents a positive outcome for the environment due to the 'artificial reefs' and associated marine life that has developed on this infrastructure.[87] Further, the bulletin notes that leaving this infrastructure in situ would provide benefits to supporting marine ecosystems, including:

- Increasing marine habitat complexity by adding both horizontal and vertical features.
- Supporting higher local fish abundance, species richness and multi-trophic food webs.
- Providing foraging and refuge habitat for marine fauna.[88]

Dr Tom Cresswell told the Committee that infrastructure can:

> Act as a hard substrate for organisms to colonise on… and form quite a diverse ecosystem. So there are quantifiable benefits to the environment from leaving this infrastructure on the seabed. However, what we need to do is ensure that there are no detriments and that any risks are as low as reasonably achievable, and this comes in to where we are then looking at the potential for contaminants to impact the marine environment.[89]

Dr Francis Norman, Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director at CODA, noted to the Committee an example of previous oil and gas infrastructure effectively being used to form an artificial reef:

> Where material is being reefed, in some instances, with that material, there is actually a lot of work involved in preparing that. They would go out and they would cut it and reposition it. The only reefing project that I am aware of that has gone full term here was one that was done in the Exmouth Gulf, and that was using materials from an old BHP asset. For that one they removed the material, they brought it to shore, they cleaned it, they took it back out and they placed it on the seabed, and around it they also placed about 100 purpose-built fish habitats. That was probably more expensive than just picking it up and removing it, and it would have certainly created more employment and more opportunities. I am not a fisherman and I am not a diver, but what I am told by the people who were involved in that is that it has created an incredibly vibrant dive site for people to go out and commune with these fish.[90]

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86 ExxonMobil, *Decommissioning Lower Steel Piled Jackets: Information Bulletin – March 2026*, 2026, <https://corporate.exxonmobil.com/-/media/global/files/locations/australia/lower-steel-piled-jacket-information-bulletin-march-2026.pdf> p. 2, accessed 5 May 2026.

87 Ibid.

88 Ibid.

89 Dr Tom Cresswell, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 12.

90 Dr Francis Norman, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 30–31.

The Committee notes that ExxonMobil's did not provide this proposal as part of its evidence, including in its submission or in the Public Hearing.

The Committee heard evidence from environmental groups refuting that artificial reefs, which may have developed around offshore oil and gas infrastructure, are significant to the greater marine environment. Stakeholders argued that these reefs do not significantly bolster fish stocks, promote diverse flora and fauna. These reefs which have formed around offshore infrastructure have the potential to introduce contaminants into the food chain.[91]

Further, the Committee heard that artificial reefs are strictly regulated, with stringent permit requirements required to create a reef. Stanley Woodhouse told the Committee:

> Artificial reefing is very tightly regulated, and under the guidelines for artificial reefing here in Australia you need to have a permit for artificial reefing and the reef needs to be intended for a very specific thing, and one of those is very much not dumping of waste, and these permits are designed to avoid the dumping of waste. At the moment the guidelines also say that any oil and gas infrastructure that is to be used for reefing needs to be first removed, cleaned and then placed somewhere appropriate.[92]

DCCEEW (Cth) notes in their artificial reefing guidelines, 'creating an artificial reef must not be considered a convenient way of disposing of material at sea'.[93] The Committee is not aware of ExxonMobil or Woodside Energy holding or applying for artificial reef permits.

The Committee also heard evidence from fishing and trawling industry representatives, who noted that infrastructure left in situ, including production platforms removed to 55 metres below sea level, pipelines and other subsea infrastructure, has the potential to damage trawling equipment. Simon Boag, Executive Officer of the South East Trawl Fishing Industry Association, told the Committee that leaving this infrastructure in situ may reduce workable fishing grounds for the trawl fishing industry.[94]

Despite the benefits, the Committee heard evidence that full removal may not be appropriate in all circumstances. Evidence expressed that this could include instances in which removal of infrastructure, in particular pipelines, would cause greater environmental harm and degradation than other outcomes, such as leaving infrastructure in place or burying pipelines.[95]

The Committee heard that several stakeholders supported the full removal of oil and gas infrastructure during the decommissioning process.

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91 Stanley Woodhouse, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 23; Nola Kelly, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 32; Protect the West, *Submission 53*, p. 3; Odi Evans, *Submission 80*, p. 1; Ian Russel, *Submission 82*, p. 1; Victorian Trades Hall Council, *Submission 138*, p. 3; Andrew McGlashan, *Submission 142*, p. 1; The Wilderness Society, *Submission 148*, p. 6.

92 Stanley Woodhouse, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 23.

93 Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, *National artificial reef guidelines*, 2023, p. 24.

94 Simon Boag, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 39.

95 Professor Tina Soliman-Hunter, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 4; Jason Medd, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 14.

Evidence presented to the Committee included differing views on decommissioning approaches, with some stakeholders supporting full removal of infrastructure, while others supported case-by-case assessment, including in situ options where appropriate.

Where artificial reefing has been successfully implemented in Australia, it is only after the structures have been removed, cleaned and then returned to the site along with appropriate resources to encourage habitat growth.

3.4.3 Ensuring that industry bears the cost of decommissioning

The Committee heard consistent concern from stakeholders, in particular environmental groups and members of the community, about oil and gas companies' commitment to paying for comprehensive decommissioning works.[96] Evidence identified that these concerns primarily stemmed from:

- historical examples of oil and gas companies failing to undertake fulsome decommissioning[97]
- the lack of transparency over the cost and scale of assets requiring decommissioning.[98]

Stakeholders consistently echoed the sentiment that all efforts should be made to ensure that oil and gas companies 'clean up when they are done'.[99] Stakeholders told the Committee that strengthened financial assurances were necessary to ensure that the costs of clean up are borne by industry and not left to the government.[100] As noted in Section 2.6, legislation and policy dictates that decommissioning, including the costs borne by it, are the responsibility of the titleholder.

One of the concerns raised was that companies that go bankrupt may be unable to pay for the costs of decommissioning. There was a fear that in these instances, the cost of decommissioning would be passed onto the government, leaving taxpayers to bear the cost instead.[101] One example of this is the decommissioning of the *Northern Endeavour* (see Case Study 3.1).

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96 Fern Cadman, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 19; Anda Banikos, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 30; Nola Kelly, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 31; Angie Moore, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 3; Cassandra Arnold, *Submission 42*, p. 1; Jason Alexander, *Submission 68*, pp. 1–2; Ian Russell, *Submission 82*, p. 1; Cheryl Peel, *Submission 135*, p. 1; Anton Bladh, *Submission 141*, p. 1.

97 Fern Cadman, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 19; Nola Kelly, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 31; Zavier Evans, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 35; Angie Moore, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 3.

98 Anda Banikos, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 36.

99 Paul Leitinger, *Submission 78*, p. 1.

100 Fern Cadman, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 19; Kevin Morrison, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 43; Angie Moore, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2; Carly Dober, *Submission 33*, p. 4; Ian Russel, *Submission 82*, p. 1; Zavier Evans, *Submission 133*, p. 1; Victorian Trades Hall Council, *Submission 138*, p. 5; Doctors for the Environment, *Submission 155*, pp. 6–7; Maritime Union of Australia, *Submission 156*, p. 14.

101 Nola Kelly, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 31; Angie Moore, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 3.

Case Study 3.1 The Northern Endeavour

The Northern Endeavour is a 274-meter-long floating production, storage and offloading (FPSO) facility. It was permanently moored between the Laminaria and Corallina oil fields, about 550 km northwest of Darwin in the Timor Sea. It was operated and majority owned by Woodside from the start of its useful life in 1999.

In 2015, Woodside notified NOPSEMA of its intention to begin the decommissioning of the Northern Endeavour as it was approaching the end of its useful life, proposing decommissioning to begin in the second half of 2016.

In 2016, Woodside announced the sale of the Northern Endeavour to Northern Oil and Gas Australia (NOGA), an operator who had no previous experience in operating a petroleum license.

NOPSEMA issued a general direction to NOGA in 2019 to stop all petroleum production until a backlog of uncompleted technical integrity work was completed, also noting significant corrosion to major infrastructure on the vessel. NOGA expended all of its available funds to comply with NOPSEMA's directions, and went into voluntary liquidation in September 2019.

The liquidation of NOGA resulted in the surrendering of its license over the field back to the Commonwealth Government. In December 2020, then Resources Minister Keith Pitt announced that the Commonwealth Government had decided to undertake decommissioning of the FPSO itself, in order to prevent future environmental damage. In 2022, the decommissioning contract was awarded to Petrofac for $325 million.

To shield taxpayers from bearing the cost of decommissioning, the Commonwealth Government passed the *Offshore Petroleum (Laminaria and Corallina Decommissioning Cost Recovery Levy)* Act 2022. The Act created a levy on registered petroleum license holders to cover any costs incurred in decommissioning the Northern Endeavour. To date, DISR has reported $1.14 billion as raised by the levy.

Source: Department of Industry, Science and Resources, Decommissioning the Northern Endeavour, 2026 <https://www.industry.gov.au/mining-oil-and-gas/oil-and-gas/offshore-oil-and-gas/decommissioning-northern-endeavour> accessed 23 February 2026; NOPSEMA, General Direction 753, 18 July 2019, <https://www.nopsema.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-03/A683466.pdf> accessed 23 February 2026.

Stakeholders cited the decommissioning of the Northern Endeavour as a 'cautionary tale' for offshore decommissioning, and that, without significant reform to ensure financial assurances from companies to provide for decommissioning, the costs could be borne by taxpayers.[102] Stakeholders suggested mandating a bond be paid to a third party by operators, and strengthening trailing liability legislation.[103]

Further, a number of stakeholders suggested the creation of a publicly accessible register of offshore oil and gas infrastructure detailing: ownership, estimated costs and the timeline for decommissioning.[104] Anda Banikos, a local Gippsland resident, told the Committee that a public register would assist with community engagement and understanding of decommissioning. It would also provide greater opportunity for public scrutiny to ensure industry funding of decommissioning.[105]

Representatives from NOPSEMA told the Committee that the Commonwealth Government has since introduced stringent trailing liability legislation through the *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Amendment (Titles Administration and Other Measures) Act* 2021 (Cth) to ensure that decommissioning costs are not passed onto taxpayers.[106] Under the legislation, the Commonwealth can pursue and issue remedial directions to companies that were formerly responsible for a decommissioned site. This includes any parent or related companies in the event that an original company no longer exists.[107] This ability relates to abandoned wells and property that has been left in situ.[108]

Stakeholders, including environmental groups, noted this legislation as an effective means of assuring companies bear the cost of decommissioning in Commonwealth waters.[109]

Richard Perry told the Committee in a public hearing that while specific financial modelling had not been undertaken, ExxonMobil is confident that they hold sufficient funding for decommissioning.[110] Representatives from Woodside Energy

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102 Fern Cadman, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 19.

103 Fern Cadman, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 19; Kevin Morrison, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 43; Anda Banikos, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 30; Angie Moore, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 8; Name Withheld, *Submission 41*, p. 1; Claire Johnson, *Submission 49*, p. 1; Anda Banikos, *Submission 50*, p. 1; Lauri Widdup, *Submission 58*, p. 1; Russel Baader, *Submission 60*, p. 1; Sarah Brennan, *Submission 64*, p. 1; Myra DeSmet, *Submission 76*, p. 2; Tim Brown, *Submission 91*, p. 2; Meredith Rose, *Submission 117*, p. 1; Maxine Andrews, *Submission 119*, p. 1; Dale Stohr, *Submission 120*, p. 3; Felicity Crombach, *Submission 126*, p. 1; Candice Stothers, *Submission 130*, p. 1; Andrew McGlashan, *Submission 142*, p. 1; Surfriders Riders Foundation Surf Coast Branch, *Submission 160*, p. 3.

104 Dr Kylie Walker, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering, public hearing, Melbourne, 10 December 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 42; Anda Banikos, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 30; Peter Wilkinson, *Submission 40*, p. 1; Name Withheld, *Submission 41*, p. 1; Cassandra Arnold, *Submission 42*, p. 2; Russel Baader, *Submission 60*, p. 1; Sarah Brennan, *Submission 64*, p. 1; Myra DeSmet, *Submission 76*, p. 1; Ian Russell, *Submission 82*, p.1; Name Withheld, *Submission 87*, p. 2; Dr Robyn Prior, *Submission 90*, p. 1; Alison Cooke, *Submission 94*, p. 3.

105 Anda Banikos, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 30.

106 David Christensen, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 65.

107 Department of Industry, Science and Resources, *Trailing liability for decommissioning of offshore petroleum property: guidelines*, 2026, <https://www.industry.gov.au/publications/trailing-liability-decommissioning-offshore-petroleum-property-guidelines/trailing-liability> accessed 5 May 2026.

108 Ibid.

109 Jason Medd, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 15; Fern Cadman, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 19; Kevin Morrison, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 43; Centre of Decommissioning Australia, *Submission 34*, p. 9; The Wilderness Society, *Submission 148*, p. 9.

110 Richard Perry, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 52.

told the Committee that it has undertaken preliminary modelling for the cost of decommissioning, and it has made provisions for current and future decommissioning.[111]

Trailing liability legislation will be discussed further in Section 3.7.1.

FINDING 3: The regulatory framework places primary responsibility for decommissioning costs on titleholders, but gaps in financial assurance arrangements may expose governments to costs if a responsible company cannot be held accountable.

FINDING 4: ExxonMobil and Woodside were unable to provide details of the potential costs of decommissioning, including a breakdown of differential costs for all removal options, due to modelling not having been done in the case of the former, and commercial in confidence in the case of the latter.

RECOMMENDATION 1: That the Victorian Government work with the Commonwealth Government to develop transparent public reporting requirements for oil and gas corporations of oil their on-and-offshore infrastructure decommissioning liabilities and provisions to cover these liabilities.

3.4.4 Degrading infrastructure

Stakeholders raised concerns with the Committee about risks associated with aging oil and gas infrastructure and its potential to degrade. These risks include:

- As oil and gas infrastructure degrades, it has a greater potential to collapse. Material can break off at higher rates into the marine environment and create a higher chance of both petroleum and greenhouse gas leaks. [112]
- Degraded infrastructure is significantly more difficult to effectively decommission.[113]

Undertaking decommissioning work on degraded infrastructure presents greater occupational health and safety risks.[114]

Stakeholders explained to the Committee that much of Victoria's offshore infrastructure is aging, with ExxonMobil's Bass Strait infrastructure operating for over 60 years.[115]

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111 Andrew Lobb, Vice-President, Decommissioning, Woodside Energy, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 60–61.

112 Fern Cadman, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 23; Lakes Entrance Fishermen's Limited, *Submission 29*, p. 1; Ms Carly Dober, *Submission 33*, p. 7; Philip Talihmanidis, *Submission 71*, p. 1; The Wilderness Society, *Submission 148*, p. 5; Greenpeace, *Submission 159*, pp. 2, 4; Surfrider Foundation Surf Coast Branch, *Submission 160*, p. 4.

113 The Wilderness Society, *Submission 148*, p. 5.

114 Angie Moore, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2; The Wilderness Society, *Submission 148*, p. 5.

115 Richard Perry, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 42.

Some of the infrastructure in the Bass Strait is beginning to degrade. NOPSEMA issued ExxonMobil an Improvement Notice in March 2026 to its Snapper well infrastructure, citing metal degradation on wells and a lack of evidence of significant maintenance for 'at least 8 years'.[116]

The Committee heard consistent evidence that ageing infrastructure has a greater chance to degrade, causing greater potential for contaminants to leak into the environment. The Committee notes evidence that indicated that there have been four recorded hydrocarbon leaks since 2024 from ExxonMobil's Bass Strait infrastructure.[117] Stanley Woodhouse told the Committee:

> These things are made of steel and that is corroding, and there are big questions about what that amount of iron oxide would do to ecosystems, let alone all of the other concerns we have, like naturally occurring radioactive materials that have concentrated in pipelines, polychlorinated biphenyls, which can bioaccumulate through the food chain – all these different things that we know are generally associated with infrastructure.[118]

Professor Tina Soliman-Hunter noted that degrading infrastructure creates unsafe work environments, making it difficult to safely decommission oil and gas infrastructure:

> There is an inherent risk to workers who are coming to decommissioning this facility that it is not in optimal condition and it is not being optimally maintained – things like corroding walkways, these sorts of things – and I believe that is a regulatory nightmare, for a start, but also a disservice to the workers who are undertaking this activity.[119]

Some stakeholders asserted to the Committee that duty holders have not been sufficiently proactive in their decommissioning efforts, leading to a higher potential for contaminant leaks.[120]

The Committee notes that the Commonwealth *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2006* (Cth) provides that monitoring and maintaining of oil and gas infrastructure must be undertaken so as to not preclude decommissioning.[121]

FINDING 5: Degrading oil and gas infrastructure has the potential to complicate decommissioning works, create unsafe working conditions and creating greater likelihood of environmental incidents.

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116 NOPSEMA, *Well integrity improvement notice 2086*, 23 March 2026, <https://www.nopsema.gov.au/sites/default/files/2026-04/Well%20Integrity%20Improvement%20Notice%202086.pdf> accessed 5 May 2026.

117 Zavier Evans, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 33; Wilderness Society, *Submission 148*, pp. 4–5.

118 Stanley Woodhouse, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 24.

119 Professor Tina Soliman-Hunter, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 6.

120 Fern Cadman, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 19–20; Stanley Woodhouse, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 23; The Wilderness Society, *Submission 148.*, pp. 4–5; Greenpeace, *Submission 159*, p. 3; Maritime Union of Australia, *Submission 156*, p. 10; Surfrider Foundation Surf Coast Branch, *Submission 160*, p. 2.

121 Angie Moore, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 8.

FINDING 6: Undertaking decommissioning work at the earliest opportunity is critical to avoid degradation of infrastructure and associated safety and environmental risks.

3.4.5 Concerns about the environmental track record of oil and gas companies

A number of stakeholders expressed concern to the Committee about oil and gas companies' track record of environmental issues in decommissioning. Some stakeholders, including local residents, expressed beliefs that oil and gas companies, including ExxonMobil and Woodside Energy, had failed to uphold environmental safety in the past.[122]

Stakeholders referred to specific instances of poor environmental outcomes for offshore infrastructure, including the decommissioning of the Minerva pipeline, and gas leaks on the Longtom fields (see Case Studies 3.2 and 3.3).[123]

Case Study 3.2 Minerva pipeline

The Minerva gas well and pipeline are located off the coast of Port Campbell and is owned and operated by Woodside Energy. As the well had reached the end of its useful life, Woodside began the decommissioning of the gas field and pipelines on 4 January 2025. Decommissioning activities were contracted to be undertaken by Luxembourgish company Subsea 7.

On 12 January, Subsea 7 crew reported to Woodside a white plastic saddle component floating beside their vessel during pipeline de-burial activities. The plastic saddle is the component which secures the 5km pipeline bundle together, with about 1600 components along the entire length of the pipeline. In their report, Subsea 7 predicted that the risk of further saddle loss was 'likely to increase during the pipe cutting stage'.

(Continued)

122 Professor Tina Soliman-Hunter, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 3; Fern Cadman, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 19; Stanley Woodhouse, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 20; Zavier Evans, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 32; Robin Gardner, *Submission 36*, p. 1; Peter Wilkinson, *Submission 40*, p. 1; Name Withheld, *Submission 41*, p. 1; Tom Knowles, *Submission 46*, p. 1; Protect the West, *Submission 53*, p. 1; Lauri Widdup, *Submission 58*, p. 1; Name Withheld, *Submission 65*, p. 1; Ian Russell, *Submission 82*, p. 1; Tim Brown, *Submission 91*, p. 1; Submission 94, *Alison Cooke*, p. 2; Regina Bos, *Submission 99*, p. 1; Meredith Rose, *Submission 117*, p. 1; Christian Brosch, *Submission 129*, p. 1; Danielle Berto, *Submission 144*, p. 1; Jack Hannan, *Submission 150*, p. 1; Penelope Adams, *Submission 153*, p. 1.

123 Fern Cadman, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 19; Zavier Evans, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 35; Claire Johnson, *Submission 49*, p. 1; Myra DeSmet, *Submission 76*, p. 1; Alison Cooke, *Submission 94*, p. 2; Andrew McGlashan, *Submission 142*, p. 2; The Wilderness Society, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 4; Greenpeace, *Submission 159*, p. 3.

Case Study 3.2 Continued

Woodside and Subsea 7 continued to undertake pipe cutting operations throughout the next three months, until cutting and recovery operations were completed on 2 April. Woodside officially reported the plastic saddle loss to NOPSEMA on 15 April via its Monthly Recordable Environmental Incident Notification Report.

NOPSEMA's investigation noted that plastic components were released on 7 occasions, starting on 12 January and concluding on 2 April. The activities released an estimated 160 components. An additional three campaigns were completed in State waters, which released 269 components. This resulted in an estimated 186kg of plastic waste being released into the environment.

NOPSEMA's investigation was published on 30 June, and concluded the following:

- The risk of plastic saddles being released into the marine environment was not considered or assessed as part of the environmental plans.
- Woodside was non-compliant with their environmental plan, due to the continued cutting of the pipeline with no successful preventative mitigation implemented.
- Woodside had adequate controls in place to mitigate further saddle losses, and to recover already lost saddles.

NOPSEMA has since issued a General Direction to Woodside, directing them to continue the work of decommissioning the remainder of the pipeline, and to review and produce a Lessons Learnt report on their decommissioning activities at Minerva.

At the time of writing, Woodside is under investigation by the Environment Protection Authority Victoria over the decommissioning of Minerva.

Source: NOPSEMA, *General Direction 2016*, 24 July 2025 <https://www.nopsema.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/General%20Direction%202016%20-%20Minerva.pdf> accessed 5 May 2026; NOPSEMA, *NOPSEMA Investigation – Minerva field management and decommissioning – Loss of plastic piggyback saddles to the marine environment*, 30 June 2025 <https://www.nopsema.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2025-12/A1209024%20-%20Report%20-%20NOPSEMA%20Investigation%20IVT14016%20Woodside%20Minerva%20-%2030%20Jun%202025%20-%20redacted%20%28A1265968%29.pdf> accessed 5 May 2026.

Case Study 3.3 Longtom Gas Field

The Longtom Gas field is located in the Gippsland Basin and is 100% owned and operated by Seven Group Holdings (SGH) Limited. The Field commenced gas production in October 2009, and continued its production until 2015, when the field was shut-in due to electrical failure of the control umbilical cords.

In the time since, SGH has not undertaken any action to recommence production or, alternatively, decommission their Longtom assets. Further, SGH has not implemented any form of continuous well monitoring or installed downhole well barriers (which stop the inadvertent leakage of gas from a wellhead) over the 11-year period.

In 2023, a gas leak, classified as 'minor' by NOPSEMA, was discovered at the Longtom-3H Christmas tree. It is not known exactly when the leak began. As a response to the discovery, SGH submitted a well operation management plan, with key commitments including:

- annual monitoring of the Longtom Wells
- remediation of the leak discovered at Longtom-3H
- operational integrity testing of Longtom wells and subsea trees every 3 years.

In December 2025, NOPSEMA issued a General Direction to SGH on the basis that key commitments from the WOMP had yet to be completed, meaning that the leak had been ongoing for over two years. NOPSEMA has described SGH's extended period of inaction as an 'erosion of good industry practice, a widening gap to established industry standards, and a potential non-compliance' with Commonwealth legislation.

NOPSEMA directed SGH to:

- take action to stop the leak from Longtom-3H by 31 March 2026
- re-instate continuous monitoring of well integrity by 30 October 2027
- provide a technical study on the suitability of the Longtom wells for future service by 30 April 2026.

Source: NOPSEMA, *General Direction 2054*, 3 December 2025 <https://www.nopsema.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/General%20Direction%202054%20-%20Longtom.pdf> accessed 5 May 2026.

These events were presented as examples of the failure of oil and gas companies operating off the coast of Victoria to meet environmental obligations with respect to decommissioning.[124]

124 Ibid.

Stanley Woodhouse noted these concerns in a public hearing:

> Companies like ExxonMobil and Woodside are highly successful corporate entities making billions of dollars in profit every year and relentlessly pursuing shareholder value at the expense of the environment and communities. I feel it would be naive to assume that now, when they are on the hook for a very costly clean up that offers no return on investment, they will suddenly choose to just do the right thing and clean up their mess without tight regulation and rigorous government oversight.[125]

This sentiment was echoed in evidence received by the Committee. For example, Anda Banikos said at a public hearing:

> I am concerned that the fossil fuel industry has contributed to pollution and loss of biodiversity through lack of adherence to environmental protection standards and regulations. I believe that to be due to systemic failures within the companies to ensure best practice installation, maintenance and decommissioning standards are met.[126]

Stakeholders noted that effective legislative and regulatory control over decommissioning activities were necessary to ensure best environmental outcomes in decommissioning. Angie Moore noted that 'Companies are more likely to do the right thing when they are being watched'.[127]

Fern Cadman, Fossil Fuel Industry Campaigner from the Wilderness Society, told the Committee that although NOPSEMA had improved as a regulator over the course of its existence, its ability to enforce consequences where titleholders fail to meet their environmental obligations and responsibilities remains limited.[128]

Evidence received from ExxonMobil indicated that they are committed to ensuring best case outcomes for the environment in its decommissioning campaign. In a public hearing, Richard Perry told the Committee that ExxonMobil's decommissioning plans were driven by environmental consideration, rather than cost.[129] Evidence received from regulatory bodies, including Resources Victoria, Environment Protection Authority (EPA) Victoria, WorkSafe, Gippsland Ports and South Gippsland Shire Council, indicated that ExxonMobil and its contractors have thus far been compliant with their obligations, environmental or otherwise.[130]

FINDING 7: Strong regulatory oversight for decommissioning is required given past environmental incidents by oil and gas companies involved in decommissioning.

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125 Stanley Woodhouse, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 20.

126 Anda Banikos, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 30.

127 Angie Moore, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 8.

128 Fern Cadman, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 27.

129 Richard Perry, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 50.

130 Chris Waites, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 13; Cr Nathan Hersey, Mayor, South Gippsland Shire Council, public hearing, Leongatha, 11 February 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 21; Dan Hunt, Director Regional Victoria, Operations Division, Environment Protection Authority Victoria, Inquiry into Decommissioning Oil and Gas Infrastructure hearing, response to questions on noticed received 27 March 2026, p. 2; Sam Jenkin, Chief Health and Safety Officer, WorkSafe, Inquiry into Decommissioning Oil and Gas Infrastructure hearing, response to questions on notice, received 26 March 2026, p. 1; Don Hough, Principal, Energy Infrastructure Regulation, Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 35.

3.5 The regulatory environment in State waters

As mentioned previously, the Victorian Government has conferred its regulatory powers for occupational health and safety, structural integrity for wells and pipelines in State waters to NOPSEMA.

WorkSafe, Victoria's workplace health and safety regulator, told the Committee it expected NOPSEMA's regulation of occupational health and safety to be broadly consistent with its own approach.[131] This is supported by a memorandum of understanding between WorkSafe and NOPSEMA, which supports collaboration and cooperation on offshore OH&S matters.[132]

The Maritime Union of Australia raised concerns to the Committee about the 'discrepancies between the offshore safety regime under the OPGGS Act and the onshore model [Work Health Safety] laws'.[133] The Union's submission explained that

> These inconsistencies weaken protections for offshore workers and complicate cooperation between regulators. The process to harmonise the OPGGS (Safety) Regulations with the national model WHS framework—first recommended by the 2020 Offshore Safety Review—has stalled, leaving two incompatible systems governing what is, in practice, one integrated workforce.[134]

The Union argued that until work health safety regimes for onshore and offshore oil and gas workers align, these 'are the areas of greatest occupational risk during decommissioning'.[135]

As established in Section 2.6, the Victorian Government's primary regulatory responsibility for offshore decommissioning in State waters involves environmental management. Resources Victoria and the EPA Victoria will primarily undertake these regulatory tasks.

Resources Victoria is the State body responsible for administering the *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act* 2010 (Vic), and thus the regulation of petroleum titles and activities offshore.[136] In State waters, Resources Victoria is responsible for the environmental management of petroleum and greenhouse gas activities, including decommissioning.[137] Representatives from Resources Victoria told the Committee that the specific responsibilities of the body in State waters include:

- management of duty holder's environmental plans, which need to be accepted before undertaking an activity

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131 Sam Jenkin, Chief Health and Safety Officer, WorkSafe, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 23.

132 Ibid, p. 24.

133 Maritime Union of Australia, *Submission 156*, p. 12.

134 Ibid.

135 Ibid.

136 Linda Bibby, Executive Director of Earth Resources Policy and Programs, Resources Victoria, Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 32–33.

137 Ibid.

- monitoring compliance with environmental plans
- enforcement mechanisms including issuing remedial directions to current and former titleholders, directing removal and management of property and directing titleholders to undertake environmental remediation
- making the final decision to accept the surrender of a lease.[138]

In a public hearing, Resources Victoria told the Committee that the State body shares common decommissioning policy settings with NOPSEMA and shares its risk-based regulatory approach.[139]

The EPA are the Victorian regulator for the environment and has aims of protecting the environment and human health from the harmful effects of pollution and waste. With respect to offshore decommissioning, the EPA's responsibilities include:

- ensuring risks of harm arising from dismantled structures on and nearshore are identified, assessed, controlled and monitored appropriately
- an advisory role in planning permits
- a support role under Victoria's emergency management framework in the event of an emergency incident
- pollution response capabilities for events in State waters, where authorised officers can be deployed
- regulation of waste management, including the recovery and recycling of recyclable waste, and safe transfer and disposal of non-recoverable waste.[140]

The EPA does not receive reports from duty holders. Instead, they receive reporting and initiate investigations based on alerts from individuals, including community members and employees of individual companies.[141]

The Committee was also informed that a number of other agencies would partly be responsible for the environmental management of offshore decommissioning in State waters. These include:

- Recycling Victoria, for the oversight of the recycling sector[142]
- Department of Transport and Planning, which requires an environmental impact assessment of proposed projects[143]
- Safe Transport Victoria, which provides permissions for and regulation of maritime transport[144]

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138 Ibid, p. 37.

139 Ibid, p. 34.

140 Dan Hunt, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 23.

141 Ibid, p. 28.

142 Department of Energy, the Environment and Climate Action, responses to questions on notice received 10 February 2026, p. 9.

143 Ibid, p. 11.

144 Ibid.

- Local Port Authorities, which ensure safety and pollution control when receiving decommissioned materials at port (in the case of the decommissioning of Bass Strait assets, Gippsland Ports).[145]
- First Nations groups, as holders of a Sea Country Indigenous Protection Area, for the conservation and protection of cultural and environmental values on Sea Country (in the Bass Strait, the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation are in the process of establishing a Sea Country IPA).[146]
- Department of Health, which manages naturally occurring radioactive material.[147]

Oil and gas companies and other industry organisations described the regulatory environment for decommissioning, including within State waters and the intersection of Commonwealth and state responsibilities, as complex.[148] In a public hearing, representatives from Woodside Energy recommended that the Victorian Government act to simplify this regulatory environment and help establish more streamlined pathways to environmental approvals.[149]

RECOMMENDATION 2: That the Victorian Government work with the Commonwealth Government to harmonise the *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage (Safety) Regulations 2024* (Cth) with the national model Work Health Safety laws, as recommended by the 2020 Offshore Safety Review.

3.5.1 The Joint Authority

Section 56 of the *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2006* (Cth) establishes the Joint Authority, which provides that the authority of an offshore area of a state (other than Tasmania) is constituted by the responsible State and Commonwealth Ministers.[150] Moreover, Section 56 establishes that a State Minister may exercise any power that is conferred in them by the Commonwealth Act.[151]

Significantly, the Joint Authority is responsible for key petroleum title decisions, including the approval, variation, cancellation and surrender of titles.[152] That is, the Victorian Minister for Energy and Resources has an equal say in determining whether a petroleum lease in Commonwealth waters can be surrendered from an operator back to the Government once decommissioned.[153]

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145 Chris Waites, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 12.

146 Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation, *Sea Country*, 2026, <https://gunaikurnai.org/our-country/sea-country> accessed 5 May 2026.

147 Dan Hunt, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 38–40; Sam Jenkin, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 28–30.

148 Richard Perry, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 44.

149 Andrew Lobb, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 59.

150 *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2006* (Cth) s 56.

151 Ibid.

152 Department of Energy, the Environment and Climate Action, responses to questions on notice received 10 February 2026, p. 3.

153 *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Act 2010* (Vic) s 56.

This affords Victoria significant input into the decommissioning process in Commonwealth waters. By using this power, the State Government has a say in any variation of lease. This includes the final surrender of a lease at the conclusion of petroleum activities, where for example a duty-holder may not have completed their decommissioning obligations to a sufficient standard.[154] This gives Victoria the ability to set clear expectations around minimum obligations for offshore decommissioning of oil and gas infrastructure.[155]

FINDING 8: The Joint Authority powers as established in the *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2006* (Cth) grants the Victorian Minister for Energy and Resources authority over approvals of variation and surrender of lease.

3.6 Setting expectations for Commonwealth decommissioning

As noted in the previous Section, Victoria has a significant say in Commonwealth decommissioning, afforded through the Joint Authority. Stakeholders told the Committee that this provides the opportunity for Victoria to set clear expectations on the standards and extent to which infrastructure off Victoria's coast is decommissioned.

Stakeholders noted that Commonwealth decision-making concerning the offshore decommissioning process can have wide-ranging impacts on Victoria.[156] This includes the potential for negative environmental outcomes and missed economic value as a result of Commonwealth decisions.[157] A number of stakeholders noted this power and suggested that the Joint Authority can be used to advocate to the Commonwealth Government for policy settings which ensure Victoria captures the full value of decommissioning. This includes advocating for the full removal of infrastructure in Commonwealth decommissioning.[158]

Angie Moore noted that the Joint Authority powers provide Victoria with a 'direct voice' to advocate for beneficial outcomes in offshore decommissioning.[159] Angie Moore explained:

> The regional development and economic opportunities or forgone opportunities will affect Victorian workers, ports and regional industries now and for generations. The first and I think most important thing that you can do is advocate strongly, using the joint authority powers, to the Commonwealth for policy settings that ensure Australia

154 Stanley Woodhouse, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 20; Maritime Union of Australia, *Submission 156*, p. 11.

155 Angie Moore, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2; Victorian Trades Hall Council, *Submission* 138, p. 2.

156 Professor Tina Soliman-Hunter, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 9; Fern Cadman, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 19.

157 Stanley Woodhouse, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 20; Dr Kylie Walker, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 42; Angie Moore, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2; Lakes Entrance Fishermen's Limited, *Submission 29*, p. 2; Dr Ken Wilson, *Submission 38*, p. 1; Tom Knowles, *Submission 46*, p. 1; Greenpeace, *Submission 159*, pp. 6–7.

158 Stanley Woodhouse, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 20; Angie Moore, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 3.

159 Angie Moore, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

> captures this value, and that includes clear expectations around full removal, domestic processing of materials and the development of local capability, and you can directly guide that through policy signalling.[160]

Stanley Woodhouse, Offshore Fossil Fuel Campaigner from Friends of the Earth Melbourne, told the Committee that Victoria should exercise this power in order to maximise economic benefits to Victoria.[161] Stanley Woodhouse argued that the Victorian Minister for Energy and Resources should exercise their power to block any approval, variation or transfer of lease that does not provide full financial assurances for decommissioning, ensuring that the State is not left with the cost of decommissioning.

Similarly, Angie Moore argued that by blocking proposed surrender of leases that have not fully removed infrastructure, Victoria can ensure it receives maximum material onshore, which in turn provides confidence to industry and investors.[162]

The Committee also heard that exercising powers under the Joint Authority provides Victoria with the opportunity to address any environmental risk associated with oil and gas infrastructure that may be left in situ after decommissioning. The Committee consistently heard from stakeholders that environmental mishaps in Commonwealth waters have direct and significant impacts on Victoria.[163] Fern Cadman told the Committee, 'when things go wrong, it is Victorian oceans, coast and communities that bear the consequences'.[164] Further, Victoria takes official responsibility for environmental noncompliance, with the National Greenhouse Accounts attributing emissions from petroleum operations in Commonwealth waters off the coast of Victoria to Victoria.[165]

3.6.1 Developing a Victorian framework for decommissioning

Victoria does not have a dedicated, publicly articulated framework or guidelines to guide offshore decommissioning policy and decision-making. The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) told the Committee in response to Questions on Notice that Victoria's relevant Acts and framework mirror both the Commonwealth and NOPSEMA.[166]

This contrasts with Western Australia, the other Australian jurisdiction where significant oil and gas decommissioning is set to occur. In 2024, Western Australia's Department of Energy, Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety released its guidelines for

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160 Ibid.

161 Stanley Woodhouse, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 20.

162 Angie Moore, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 3.

163 Fern Cadman, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 20; Angie Moore, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2; Friends of the Earth Melbourne, *Submission 105*, p. 4; Victorian Trades Hall Council, *Submission 138*, p. 2; Victorian Trades Hall Council, *Submission 138*, p. 2; Maritime Union of Australia, *Submission 156*, pp. 7, 11–12.

164 Fern Cadman, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 20.

165 Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, responses to questions on notice received 10 February 2026, p. 1.

166 Ibid., p. 4.

decommissioning onshore and offshore petroleum and geothermal energy equipment. The guidelines set the Department's expectations for decommissioning of oil and gas assets in the State, providing operators, industry and community with a greater degree of certainty over what decommissioning will entail.[167]

It should be noted that unlike Victoria, Western Australia has not conferred any of its regulatory responsibilities for offshore decommissioning to NOPSEMA. In addition, Western Australia has a number of gas facilities onshore and in State waters, which it is responsible for regulating in terms of decommissioning. While Victoria's regulatory load is limited in comparison, stakeholders noted the significance of developing an explicit framework for decommissioning in Victoria as a signal to industry.[168]

Angie Moore told the Committee that publishing a framework provides the opportunity for Victoria to provide a clear position on expectations for decommissioning, including on full removal of infrastructure and ongoing monitoring of wells.[169] Angie Moore suggested that this positioning would both indicate to markets and investors the extent of the opportunity ahead, best preparing Victorian industry to capitalise on decommissioning.[170]

Further to preparing industry, Professor Tina Soliman-Hunter argued that determining a clear decommissioning framework is essential to ensure safe and timely decommissioning.[171] Current regulatory arrangements involve separate consideration of the three key plans for decommissioning (safety, environment and well operations management plans).[172] Professor Tina Soliman-Hunter argued that the siloed consideration of plans creates a barrier to a comprehensive assessment of decommissioning plans, and told the Committee that Victoria should consider creating a decommissioning framework that incorporates all three plans.[173]

In addition, producing a specific state framework for decommissioning could address regulatory ambiguity associated with the split between State and Commonwealth regulatory responsibilities. The Committee heard from Australian Energy Producers (AEP), the national body for Australia's upstream oil and gas industry, that the Commonwealth framework is 'mature, risk-based [and] nationally consistent'.[174] AEP recommended that Victoria recognise Commonwealth primacy in this space, and should avoid creating duplicative or inconsistent frameworks for decommissioning.[175]

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167 Department of Energy, Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety Western Australia, *Decommissioning of petroleum and geothermal energy property, equipment and infrastructure in Western Australian onshore areas and State coastal waters*, March 2024, p. 3.

168 Angie Moore, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 2–3.

169 Ibid, p. 3.

170 Ibid.

171 Professor Tina Soliman-Hunter, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 9.

172 Ibid, p. 6.

173 Ibid.

174 Jason Medd, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 10.

175 Australian Energy Producers, *Submission 140*, p. 1.

However, as discussed previously, Commonwealth led decommissioning will have direct impacts upon state waters and land. As such, Victoria should make clear its expectations for decommissioning off its State waters, to best manage environmental risk and secure the potential value of decommissioning for Victoria. Professor Soliman-Hunter told the Committee at a public hearing:

> **Gaelle BROAD:** The Australian Energy Producers recommend that Victoria should recognise Commonwealth primacy in this space and align its decision-making where necessary with that of the Commonwealth. Would you agree with that?
>
> **Tina SOLIMAN-HUNTER:** No. The reason for that is mainly for the reasons that I have just said, which is that the Commonwealth looks after the Commonwealth's interests. The reality is the Commonwealth jurisdiction does not come beyond 3 nautical miles, so they are not the ones that if there is an oil leak or if something goes wrong it is going to end up on their shores and it is their electors and electorate that are going to be affected.[176]

A Victorian decommissioning framework should set out clear expectations for decommissioning in Commonwealth waters. This includes the present decommissioning Campaign 1 being undertaken in the Bass Strait, and future decommissioning efforts, including the decommissioning of pipelines after gas production has concluded. These expectations should include:

- removal of oil and gas infrastructure, including pipelines, unless it can be demonstrated that leaving infrastructure in situ in perpetuity delivers better environmental outcomes
- ensuring that decommissioned material is made available for onshore recycling
- the ongoing monitoring of wells and any infrastructure left in situ, including pipelines, to be funded by titleholders, including via a trailing liability scheme.

Recycling of decommissioned materials will be discussed in Chapter 4 and 5. A trailing liability scheme will be discussed in Section 3.7.1.

FINDING 9: The default regulatory setting for decommissioning is the complete removal of all infrastructure and assets from title area.

176 Professor Tina Soliman-Hunter, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 9.

RECOMMENDATION 3: That the Victorian Government develop a decommissioning framework that sets out clear expectations for decommissioning standards in State and offshore Commonwealth waters, and utilise the Joint Authority powers to enforce these expectations. The decommissioning framework should include:

- Removal of oil and gas infrastructure, including pipelines, unless it can be demonstrated that leaving infrastructure in situ in perpetuity delivers better environmental outcomes.
- Ensuring that decommissioned material is made available for onshore recycling.
- The ongoing monitoring, maintenance and rectification of wells, pipelines and any other infrastructure left in situ, including for structural integrity and hazardous leaks, to be funded by titleholders, including via a trailing liability scheme.
- Independent verification that decommissioning and remediation obligations, including plugging and abandonment of wells, have been met prior to the surrender of a title.

3.7 Strengthening accountability and collaboration

The Committee was told that regulatory settings need to be strengthened and that collaboration between the State and Commonwealth Governments needs to be improved to manage environmental risk and ensure taxpayers do not take on financial liability for decommissioning.

Areas of focus included the introduction of trailing liability provisions, the monitoring of decommissioned wells and infrastructure, the coordination between regulators and the accessibility of information relating to offshore assets.

3.7.1 Trailing liability legislation

The Committee heard concerns regarding the potential for the costs of decommissioning to fall onto the taxpayer, specifically for State waters.

Resources Victoria spoke to the Committee about financial assurances for decommissioning, noting that this occurs when the environment plan is finalised.[177] Evidence indicated that once the 'environment plan be accepted, then a direction is issued on the authority holder to hold sufficient insurance against the activities to take place'.[178]

Concerning the details of financial assurances, Resources Victoria explained that it is concerned with 'activities and any incidents around the pipelines in Victorian waters, and the Commonwealth regulators would be setting the requirements for financial assurance for the infrastructure in Commonwealth waters'.[179]

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177 Linda Bibby, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 37.

178 Ibid, p. 38.

179 Sandra O'Farrell, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 38.

Moreover, evidence noted that titleholders are responsible for managing and cleaning up any petroleum spills from their operations, including impacts that spread into State waters or land.[180] If they fail, Commonwealth regulators can step in and take over, consulting with the affected state.[181] In Victoria, the Department of Transport and Planning leads responses to spills entering State waters under the State Emergency Management Plan, with support from DEECA and other agencies.[4][182]

Further, Dan Hunt, Director of Regional Victoria, Operations Division for the EPA, told the Committee that the general environmental duty, as provided in the *Environment Protection Act 2017* (Vic), would provide a mechanism through which Victoria can ensure post-decommissioning costs are borne by titleholders:

> **The CHAIR:** If the pipelines are decommissioned and left in situ and the licences are handed back, who bears responsibility under the general order for the maintenance of the pipelines?
>
> **Dan HUNT:** That would be the company that has left the pipeline there. They have the duty to maintain and minimise those risks as far as reasonably practical.
>
> **The CHAIR:** Even if they have handed their licence back?
>
> **Dan HUNT:** Yes. The general environmental duty still applies.[183]

However, the Committee heard that this legislation only applies to companies which still exist.[184] The Committee heard that if a company no longer exists, the regulator may attempt to seek cost recovery from a former title holder if one can be identified.[185] Otherwise the responsibility and cost would fall to the State.[186]

As noted in Case Study 3.1 on the Northern Endeavour, the high cost of decommissioning may cause companies to undergo bankruptcy in their attempts to decommission. Evidence noted examples in which companies have deliberately altered their corporate structure to avoid decommissioning costs.[187] Stakeholders noted that state trailing liability legislation is not as rigorous as that of the Commonwealth in its ability to pursue costs from entities related to the former titleholder.[188]

Victoria has historically acted to mirror Commonwealth decommissioning legislation.[189] However, academic and environmental groups noted that Victoria has not yet acted

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180 Resources Victoria, Inquiry into Decommissioning Oil and Gas Infrastructure public hearing, response to questions on notice received 27 March 2026, p. 3.

181 Ibid.

182 Ibid.

183 Dan Hunt, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 25

184 Ibid, p. 26

185 Linda Bibby, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 36.

186 Ibid, p. 42.

187 The Wilderness Society, *Submission 148*, p. 2.

188 Fern Cadman, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 19; Kevin Morrison, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 43; The Wilderness Society, *Submission 148*, p. 2.

189 Fern Cadman, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 27.

to mirror more recent legislation, in particular trailing liability. These stakeholders highlighted the strength of Commonwealth trailing liability legislation, chiefly pointing to the ability for the Commonwealth to recover costs from parent and related entities of former companies.[190]

Stakeholders advocated that the Victorian Government mirror this legislation.[191] The Committee notes that a trailing liability can be utilised to ensure the ongoing monitoring of wells and any infrastructure that has been left in situ in State waters, including pipelines.

FINDING 10: Financial assurances and cost recovery mechanisms ensure risks are largely borne by the oil and gas industry, though the Victorian Government may assume costs for decommissioning if no responsible titleholder exists.

FINDING 11: The Victorian *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2010* does not provide for trailing liability of oil and gas assets once a lease has been surrendered, unlike the Commonwealth *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2006*.

RECOMMENDATION 4: That the Victorian Government amend the *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2010* (Vic) to mirror the 2021 Commonwealth amendments to the *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2006* (Cth) with respect to trailing liability. Trailing liability legislation should include provisions to ensure titleholders are responsible for the ongoing monitoring of any infrastructure left in situ.

3.7.2 Monitoring of state wells and infrastructure

The Committee heard similar concerns from stakeholders with respect to the monitoring of abandoned wells in State waters (discussed in Section 3.4.1). While the Committee understands that NOPSEMA has not undertaken significant monitoring work of wells after they have been decommissioned, Resources Victoria has undertaken some monitoring for the State's four decommissioned wells.[192]

In a public hearing, Linda Bibby from Resources Victoria told the Committee that a well monitoring program was implemented in 2021, where cameras were used to inspect decommissioned wells.[193] Resources Victoria told the Committee that this program had detected no leaks from decommissioned wells to date, and that the program would

190 Fern Cadman, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 21.

191 Fern Cadman, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 19; Kevin Morrison, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 43.

192 Linda Bibby, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 34.

193 Ibid.

continue to be implemented. Individual checks, however, would not be undertaken on a regular basis, rather on a case by case basis whenever risk is otherwise identified.[194]

As noted in Section 3.4.1, the ongoing monitoring of wells is an essential practice to ensure that decommissioning has been effective, and to confirm that wells will not leak in perpetuity. Further, Section 3.4.2 and 3.4.3 note the danger that can arise from infrastructure, including pipelines, remaining in situ in perpetuity, in particular the release of contaminants into the marine environment. The Committee notes that evidence supported the implementation of ongoing monitoring of wells and infrastructure that has been left in situ. As a stage in the decommissioning cycle, this monitoring should be funded by industry, in line with Commonwealth Guidelines, and the responsibility and associated costs of decommissioning should be borne by industry.

FINDING 12: Strong well monitoring processes are essential to ensuring well integrity and preventing oil and gas leaks into the environment

RECOMMENDATION 5: That Resources Victoria implement well monitoring on State wells on a regular basis, including onto the five Victorian wells yet to be decommissioned, to be paid for by former titleholders through trailing liability payments.

3.7.3 Strengthening collaboration between State and Commonwealth agencies

By nature of jurisdiction and legislation, the decommissioning process in State waters will need to involve collaboration between State and Federal regulators in State waters. Further, as activities undertaken in Commonwealth waters can have implications for State lands and waters, stakeholders expressed that strong communication and information sharing between state and federal actors is needed to ensure effective responses to issues.[195]

The Committee heard evidence that collaboration between state and federal agencies is not mandated by legislation.[196] Representatives from the EPA and NOPSEMA confirmed to the Committee that no legal obligation exists for NOPSEMA to notify state agencies of any incidents occurring in Commonwealth waters, including those which have the potential to impact state waters and land.[197]

The Committee heard from WorkSafe and Resources Victoria that NOPSEMA has engaged well with both agencies.[198] At a public hearing, Sue McCarrey described

194 Sandra O'Farrell, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 35.

195 Centre of Decommissioning Australia, *Submission 34*, p. 11; Maritime Union of Australia, *Submission 156*, p. 8.

196 Dan Hunt, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 28; Sue McCarrey, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 70.

197 Ibid.

198 Sam Jenkin, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 26–27; Dan Hunt, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 28.

NOPSEMA's drive to engage with state counterparts as an ethical responsibility, rather than anything approaching an obligation.[199]

The EPA told the Committee that developing a memorandum of understanding between state agencies and NOPSEMA would be beneficial to ensuring effective communication and collaboration in decommissioning.[200]

Given the significance of the decommissioning task, the Committee notes that strong communication and collaboration between state and federal regulators is essential to ensure decommissioning is undertaken in a safe, efficient and beneficial manner.

FINDING 13: The decommissioning regulatory environment is complex, and involves significant interactions between State and Commonwealth regulators.

FINDING 14: There exists no legal requirement for the Commonwealth regulator, NOPSEMA, to communicate and collaborate with State regulators.

RECOMMENDATION 6: That the Victorian Government advocate to the Commonwealth Government to legislate mandatory reporting and information sharing of decommissioning related incidents by NOPSEMA to its related State counterparts.

3.7.4 Strengthening the accessibility of information

Stakeholders identified concerns with the accessibility of information about Victoria's oil and gas infrastructure. This sentiment was echoed by a wide range of groups.

In its submission, the Wilderness Society told the Committee:

> Victoria and Australia lack a comprehensive and transparent dataset on oil and gas infrastructure. This a barrier to its effective regulation, contractors planning for decommissioning activities, and the ability of First Nations people, local communities and environmental organisations to scrutinise the activities of an industry with a track record of causing environmental harm.[201]

The Committee heard evidence that this lack of publicly available information:

- hinders communities ability to understand, engage and scrutinise decommissioning works that may impact their local area[202]

199 Sue McCarrey, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 71.

200 Dan Hunt, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 29.

201 The Wilderness Society, *Submission 148*, p. 7.

202 Anda Banikos, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 32.

- limits industry and governments ability to properly plan for incoming materials produced from decommissioning[203]
- creates unnecessary barriers between operators and Government to achieving a share understanding.[204]

A number of submissions supported the establishment of a publicly accessible register of oil and gas infrastructure, which they argued would improve information accessibility.[205] Stakeholders suggested that this register could include information on the legal ownership of infrastructure, as well as the estimated costs and timeline for decommissioning.[206]

Further, Dr Kylie Walker, Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering, told the Committee that this register would provide significant advantages to industry and government in economic planning for receiving decommissioned infrastructure:

> By developing a comprehensive register of infrastructure due to decommission, with an inventory of waste streams included to support a circular economy as it develops, the Victorian government can also benchmark a critical support mechanism for industry, academia and government to come together and collaborate on this new industry, and that could also, importantly, serve as a strategic lever to enhance international and interstate collaboration and partnerships too.[207]

Woodside Energy noted support for a dataset that maps oil and gas infrastructure, such as the database developed by CODA, arguing that giving regulators and operators a shared reference point would be advantageous to effective decommissioning.[208]

FINDING 15: A lack of publicly available information on offshore oil and gas equipment limits transparency and the ability of third parties to scrutinise oil and gas activities.

RECOMMENDATION 7: That the Victorian Government develop a publicly accessible register of oil and gas infrastructure in Victoria, which includes the condition of infrastructure and wells, information surrounding the ownership of infrastructure and the estimated costs and timelines for decommissioning.

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203 Dr Kylie Walker, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 42.

204 Andrew Lobb, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 59.

205 Peter Wilkinson, *Submission 40*, p. 1; Name Withheld, *Submission 41*, p. 1; Cassandra Arnold, *Submission 42*, p. 2; Russel Baader, *Submission 60*, p. 1; Sarah Brennan, *Submission 64*, p. 1; Myra DeSmet, *Submission 76*, p. 1; Ian Russell, *Submission 82*, p. 1; Name Withheld, *Submission 87*, p. 2; Dr Robyn Prior, *Submission 90*, p. 1; Alison Cooke, *Submission 94*, p. 3.

206 Ibid.

207 Dr Kylie Walker, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 42.

208 Andrew Lobb, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 59.

Chapter 4
Victoria's role in the onshore decommissioning process

4.1 Introduction

Onshore decommissioning, in the case of ExxonMobil's Campaign 1, will include the set down and dismantling of oil and gas infrastructure such as production platforms and steel piled jackets. These activities come with environmental and occupational safety risks due to contaminants associated with oil and gas production and the inherent dangers in dismantling large structures.

This Chapter gives an overview of the planned decommissioning activities as part of Campaign 1 and the Victorian Government's regulatory settings for these activities. It also addresses concerns about the environmental risks associated with onshore oil and gas decommissioning and looks at engagement with local stakeholders including traditional owner groups.

4.2 Onshore decommissioning in Victoria

As noted in Chapter 2, the Victorian Government's understanding of the decommissioning lifecycle consists of the following phases:

- 'Initial planning and permitting for the removal of structures
- Well-plugging and abandonment
- Removal of structures
- Transport to ports
- Onshore processing, recycling and disposal of materials'.[1]

The Centre of Decommissioning Australia (CODA) elaborated further on Victoria's onshore decommissioning process, stating that 'removed materials are then landed into appropriately prepared port facilities, cleaned, processed, disassembled and sorted for either recycling/reuse or for disposal in appropriate waste facilities'.[2]

1 Linda Bibby, Executive Director of Earth Resources Policy and Programs, Resources Victoria, Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 34.

2 Centre of Decommissioning Australia, *Submission 34*, p. 6.

Stakeholders identified opportunities that onshore decommissioning presents for Victoria such as:

- economic and employment growth, including a domestic onshore decommissioning industry and recycling industry
- development of infrastructure and port assets
- integration of Traditional Owner leadership, authority and knowledge.[3]

4.2.1 The State Government's role in delivering onshore decommissioning policy outcomes for Victoria

The Victorian Government is solely responsible for regulating onshore decommissioning activities.[4] Resources Victoria informed the Committee that 'Victorian and Commonwealth Governments share common decommissioning policy settings, including full removal of infrastructure as the base case, with alternatives considered case by case.'[5] The State Government may refuse 'Applications for title surrender … if decommissioning is incomplete'.[6]

The Committee heard that this Inquiry represents a key opportunity for the State Government to establish leadership 'within the national framework' and ensure the emerging decommissioning industry delivers benefits for Victorians.[7]

The Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) stated that Victoria can use its regulatory and planning mechanisms 'to ensure decommissioning work is done safely, transparently and onshore'.[8] The Union emphasised that Victoria should establish itself 'as a model jurisdiction for state-based decommissioning governance and industry development'. The Committee notes that Western Australia has developed a state-level framework led by CODA to define responsibilities and priorities 'to capture onshore dismantling and recycling work'.[9]

At a public hearing, the MUA emphasised that decommissioning is a 'whole-of-government activity' that extends across many government portfolios.[10] Oil and gas decommissioning policy analyst for the Maritime Union of Australia,

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3 Jason Medd, *Transcript of* evidence, p. 11; Nathan Hersey, *Transcript of* evidence, p. 20; Carly Dober, *Submission 33*, p. 6; Centre of Decommissioning Australia, *Submission 34*, p. 10; Lauri Widdup, *Submission 58*, p. 2; Liane Gibson, *Submission 67*, p. 2; Tim Brown, *Submission 91*, p. 2; Regina Bos, *Submission 99*, p. 2; Friends of the Earth Melbourne, *Submission 105*, p. 5; Meridith Rose, *Submission 117*, p. 1; Erin Sleeth, *Submission 127*, p. 1; ExxonMobil Australia, Submission 137, p. 2; Victorian Trades Hall Council, Submission 138, pp. 5–7; Andrew McGlashan, *Submission 142*, pp. 1–2; South Gippsland Shire Council, *Submission 143*, p. 1; Doctors for the Environment, *Submission 155*, pp. 8–9; Maritime Union of Australia, *Submission 156*, pp. 16–18; Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation, *Submission 164*, p. 1.

4 Centre of Decommissioning Australia, *Submission 34,* p. 8.

5 Linda Bibby, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 33.

6 Ibid.

7 Maritime Union of Australia, *Submission 156,* p. 6.

8 Ibid., p. 7.

9 Ibid.

10 Angie Moore, Policy Analyst, Oil and Gas Decommissioning, Maritime Union of Australia, Victoria Branch, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 6

Victoria Branch, Angie Moore stated that the State Government needs 'to act in a coordinated and concerted way' to manage the scale of decommissioning and drive industry growth.[11]

FINDING 16: Onshore decommissioning requires a coordinated, whole-of-government approach by the Victorian Government to manage its scale and drive industry growth.

4.2.2 Local government's role in the onshore decommissioning process

As noted in Chapter 2, dismantling and recycling of ExxonMobil's decommissioned oil and gas infrastructure will take place at Barry Beach Marine Terminal in South Gippsland. Evidence from the South Gippsland Shire Council reinforced that 'the scale and nature of the infrastructure requiring decommissioning both offshore and onshore is significant and will extend over the coming decades'.[12]

South Gippsland Shire Council emphasised that 'the impact of this work will be felt most directly in host communities such as ours here in South Gippsland'.[13] Mayor for South Gippsland Shire Council, Cr Nathan Hersey stated that the 'community will experience the final and most visible part of the decommissioning process' given that Barry Beach Marine Terminal will serve as the 'primary onshore location for decommissioning activity'.[14]

The Council reinforced that 'oil and gas decommissioning is a major project for South Gippsland', which communities could benefit from if it is 'done well'.[15] Cr Nathan Hersey said that effective onshore decommissioning 'can deliver jobs, support workforce transition and continue a safe and orderly shift to renewable energy in the future'.[16] Whereas poor delivery 'risks leaving communities with unmanaged impacts and long-term liabilities'.[17]

The Council expressed strong support for 'clear regulatory powers to ensure decommissioning is timely and is well managed, planned and appropriately sequenced'.[18] The Council also called for 'robust financial assurance arrangements to ensure that the full cost of the decommissioning is met by industry and not transferred to governments, councils or communities in the future'.[19]

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11 Danae Bosler, Assistant Secretary, Victorian Trades Hall Council, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 March 2026 *Transcript of evidence,* pp. 6–7.

12 Cr Nathan Hersey, Mayor, South Gippsland Shire Council, public hearing, Leongatha, 11 February 2026, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 20.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., p. 21.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid., p. 20.

19 Ibid.

As part of their preparation for onshore decommissioning activities, the Committee heard that South Gippsland Shire Council along with Latrobe City Council and Regional Development Australia endorsed the *Renewable Energy Impact and Readiness Study*, which describes 'the impacts of large-scale energy projects'.[20] Cr Nathan Hersey outlined findings from the study, which are relevant to the council's ability to support decommissioning activities:

- Early planning is critical 'to manage peak workforce demand, avoid ad hoc land use outcomes and ensure adequate provisions for laydown areas, port expansion, waste handling, recycling and supporting industrial uses'.
- Workforce transition and skills continuity is important to align 'decommissioning activity with future industries, such as offshore wind, to retain skilled workforce locally and to reduce reliance on fly-in, fly-out labour'.
- 'Strong coordination across all levels of government, industry and councils' is critical 'to align regulatory frameworks, infrastructure investment, workforce planning and community engagement'.[21]

South Gippsland Shire Council described its role in the onshore decommissioning process 'is to identify the appropriate land and infrastructure required and then work in collaboration with government and industry' to realise these aims.[22] The Committee was told that the Council is looking at industrial as well as land for housing.[23]

The Council expressed concerns about availability of housing for workers for major projects including oil and gas decommissioning and the Marinus Link interconnector.[24] This will increase pressure on local accommodation, services, and infrastructure.[25] They emphasised that business and industry needs to lead and provide solutions on this issue, which includes 'where a workforce will be located and how they will be transported to and from where they work'.[26]

The road network surrounding Barry Beach Marine Terminal 'may need investment' and 'upgrades to facilitate' the increased volume of traffic associated with onshore decommissioning works.[27] The Council explained that it is working with the Department of Transport and Planning to identify 'priorities and issues' for the road network, given that it is mainly State managed.[28]

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20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Christian Stefani, Manager, Regional Partnerships, South Gippsland Shire Council, public hearing, Melbourne, 11 February 2026, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 24.

23 Cr Nathan Hersey, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 22.

24 South Gippsland Shire Council, *Submission 143,* p. 2.

25 Ibid.

26 Christian Stefani, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 24.

27 Ibid., p. 26.

28 Ibid.

The Committee heard that Council does 'not have the financial capacity to just absorb projects and pay up-front'.[29] It emphasised that government support for infrastructure and services is essential to maximise the benefits of decommissioning projects and minimise impacts on local communities.[30]

South Gippsland Shire Council stated that ExxonMobil, through its subsidiary Esso, advised that 'they will be making contributions through community benefits or other community funds to support services and infrastructure'.[31] The Committee heard that the specific details of the benefits, which will flow to the community, are 'still being determined'.[32] The Council believe the State Government is responsible for playing a coordinating role to determine how the community will benefit from decommissioning projects.[33]

The Council urged the State Government to 'lead the way' and establish 'a minimum level' of benefits that community should receive from decommissioning activities, emphasising that 'We do not want to see a case where we do not have the benefits locally'.[34]

FINDING 17: Local government needs coordinated support and funding from both the State Government and the oil and gas industry to ensure that community is not left with unmanaged impacts or financial burdens from oil and gas decommissioning projects.

RECOMMENDATION 8: That the Victorian Government ensure adequate funding is available, including from oil and gas corporations, undertaking decommissioning for appropriate infrastructure and services in regions and communities hosting decommissioning projects to ensure that communities benefit and local councils are not financially impacted.

RECOMMENDATION 9: That the Victorian Government establish a policy framework for onshore decommissioning that aligns local councils and industry to plan infrastructure and workforce needs for decommissioning projects and outlines minimum benefit expectations for host regions and communities.

29 Ibid., p. 24.

30 South Gippsland Shire Council, *Submission 143,* p. 2.

31 Christian Stefani, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 24.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Cr Nathan Hersey, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 24.

4.2.3 ExxonMobil's Campaign 1: the onshore decommissioning approach

ExxonMobil stated that decommissioning is highly regulated and requires a complex approvals process across Commonwealth, State and local governments, with over 80 separate approvals needed for its Campaign 1 project.[35] These included Commonwealth environmental approvals, state consents under Victorian legislation, and local planning permits, with no work undertaken until all regulatory requirements are met.[36]

ExxonMobil Australia's Major Projects Manager, Richard Perry described the onshore decommissioning component of its Campaign 1. The offshore oil and gas structures will be:

- Brought into Barry Beach Marine Terminal, where they will be off-loaded onto the quay and taken to the lay-down location.
- Treated to remove hazardous waste, in line with regulatory requirements.
- Dismantled at Barry Beach Marine Terminal on an impermeable membrane.
- Sent off for recycling after full demolition.[37]

The infrastructure is expected to arrive at Barry Beach Marine Terminal in late 2027,[38] and the dismantling and recycling of infrastructure will take around 3 years.[39]

ExxonMobil stated that Barry Beach was selected for its onshore decommissioning site due to its 'proximity to field, sheltered transportation for the structures, lay-down space available and proximity to the required workforce in Gippsland'.[40] CMA Contracting, a Gippsland-based contractor, will support dismantling works at the onshore site.[41]

The onshore site will include office facilities, an impermeable membrane as part of the lay-down area to manage runoff and contaminants and a water treatment system to manage run-off.[42] ExxonMobil stated that its design layout for the onshore site replicates Norwegian yards, which they characterised as 'the gold standard'.[43]

The Committee heard that hazardous waste and materials, such as asbestos and Naturally Occurring Radioactive Materials (NORM), will be removed from structures in

35 Richard Perry, Major Projects Manager, Australia, ExxonMobil, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 44.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid, p. 45.

38 Ibid., pp. 45–46.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid., p. 44.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid, p. 45.

43 Ibid.

compliance with regulations before demolition and recycling.[44] Richard Perry stated that hazardous materials will be stripped and processed 'under the EPA requirements and in consultation with all the relevant regulators', emphasising that appropriate disposal pathways will be followed.[45] Evidence noted that any NORM-contaminated materials will be brought onshore, where they will be processed and cleaned.[46] ExxonMobil stated that NORM will then be securely packaged in accordance with radiation guidelines and transported to approved disposal facilities, likely in Western Australia.[47]

ExxonMobil stated that its preference is to recycle decommissioned infrastructure within Australia and is working with the Australian Steel Institute to assess domestic steel recycling capacity, though offshore may be an option.[48] Final destinations for recycling future steel volumes are not yet confirmed by ExxonMobil, though options such as the steel recycling mill at Laverton are being considered.[49] Richard Perry noted that the timing of decommissioning will determine when materials enter the recycling market, with dismantling expected to begin in 2027.[50]

FINDING 18: ExxonMobil's onshore decommissioning process at Barry Beach Marine Terminal is expected to start in late 2027 with infrastructure dismantling and recycling expected to take around three years.

FINDING 19: The design of ExxonMobil's onshore decommissioning site includes measures to manage contaminants and run-off and reduce potential impacts on the surrounding environment.

FINDING 20: ExxonMobil states that hazardous materials including asbestos and NORM will be removed and managed under strict regulatory and EPA oversight with radioactive waste managed in alignment with radiation guidelines.

FINDING 21: ExxonMobil has expressed a preference to recycle decommissioned infrastructure within Australia, although final destinations for materials remain undecided and offshore locations remain an option.

Further recommendations on recycling of decommissioned material occur in Section 5.3.1.

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44 Ibid.

45 Richard Perry, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 52.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid., pp. 49–51.

49 Ibid.; Jerusha Beresford, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 52.

50 Ibid., p. 49.

ExxonMobil's engagement in Gippsland

ExxonMobil outlined its community engagement across Gippsland, which includes information sessions, stakeholder meetings, newsletters, and direct consultation. There have been more than 30,000 stakeholder interactions since 2020 regarding decommissioning plans.[51] ExxonMobil also highlighted that it provides support through its community contributions programs along with its social investments to community organisations that are near operating sites.[52]

ExxonMobil stated that community feedback has directly influenced changes to its decommissioning plans. This includes the use of wider transport barges to reduce the risk of marine growth from overhanging steel jackets entering Corner Inlet. Another initiative is self-propelled transporters to move the infrastructure from the barges to Barry Beach Marine Terminal, this will avoid removing native vegetation and minimise impacts on birdlife and fauna.[53]

ExxonMobil also noted its close engagement with local councils and communities to understand concerns around roads and accommodation, stating that it expects most decommissioning jobs to be filled by local workers. This will limit pressure on local housing and services.[54] The company acknowledged South Gippsland Shire Council's concerns about accommodation requirements and emphasised that coordination with local government would be ongoing.[55]

ExxonMobil stated that it has a very good, long-term consultation relationship with the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC), consisting of monthly meetings on decommissioning and related activities.[56] The Committee heard that engagement to date has been primarily consultative, with no confirmed employment outcomes for Traditional Owners.[57] ExxonMobil indicated that it is exploring greater involvement, including roles such as marine mammal observers and participation in community programs such as seagrass replanting in Corner Inlet, with further collaboration being discussed at senior levels.[58]

FINDING 22: ExxonMobil's decommissioning approach demonstrates ongoing consultation with local communities, councils, and Traditional Owners as part of its Campaign 1 project.

51 Ibid., p. 44.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid., p. 48.
54 Ibid., pp. 51–52.
55 Ibid., p. 52.
56 Ibid., p. 53.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.

ExxonMobil is transfering the decommissioning project execution to Woodside

The Committee heard at a public hearing that 'the decommissioning project execution will transfer to Woodside as the operator'.[59] As discussed in Chapter 2, ExxonMobil is transferring operatorship of its oil and gas assets in the Bass Strait to Woodside. It told the Committee that existing decommissioning obligations and contractual arrangements will remain unchanged following the transfer of operatorship to Woodside.[60] Richard Perry stated that this is 'a transition of operatorship' and both ExxonMobil and Woodside will retain 50% as part of the joint venture.[61] They both emphasised that decommissioning obligations are shared equally as joint owners of the assets, and arrangements for decommissioning will remain unchanged following Woodside's commencement as operator.[62]

Woodside emphasised that a key decommissioning risk is being underprepared for large-scale offshore activities, highlighting the importance of early planning, understanding environmental conditions, and selecting appropriate methods and timing to minimise environmental impacts.[63] The company also identified the need to be ready to meet regulatory obligations as production ends, particularly regarding timelines for well plugging, abandonment, and infrastructure removal.[64]

Woodside identified opportunities to improve decommissioning processes through better coordination between Commonwealth and State governments, including:

- establishing single points of contact for approvals
- enabling approvals to occur in parallel rather than sequentially
- further developing national mapping of decommissioning waste and facility capacity through CODA to support both regulators and industry.[65]

Concerning its other projects, Woodside indicated that 94% of infrastructure retrieved from its Minerva decommissioning project has been recycled, with steel processed locally at InfraBuild in Laverton North after extensive cleaning and testing.[66] The Committee heard that concrete and most plastics have also been recycled through Melbourne-based facilities, with recycling activities expected to continue until September 2026.[67]

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59 Ibid., p. 45.

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid., p. 45.

62 Ibid., p. 48; Andrew Lobb, Vice President, Decommissioning, Woodside Energy, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 56.

63 Andrew Lobb, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 56.

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid., p. 58.

66 Philippa Milne, Senior Environmental Adviser, Woodside Energy, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 59.

67 Ibid.

FINDING 23: Woodside is assuming operatorship of oil and gas assets in the Bass Strait previously operated by ExxonMobil. Woodside will be responsible for executing decommissioning projects following the transfer of operatorship from ExxonMobil.

FINDING 24: ExxonMobil and Woodside both stated that decommissioning obligations and works will reflect the plans outlined by ExxonMobil to the Committee, following Woodside's commencement as operator for the Bass Strait oil and gas assets.

4.3 Examining Victoria's onshore regulatory framework

Chapter 2 broadly discussed the legislative and regulatory framework underpinning onshore decommissioning in Victoria. The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) oversees energy infrastructure regulation. Resources Victoria, which sits within DEECA is the regulator for onshore energy infrastructure.

Acting Executive Director of Policy and Programs for Resources Victoria, Linda Bibby described Resources Victoria's role in onshore decommissioning. She indicated that its responsibilities consist of regulating 'petroleum titles, operations and rehabilitation requirements, including bonds'.[68] Linda Bibby discussed the roles of other State agencies in the onshore decommissioning regulatory framework 'the energy infrastructure regulator oversees pipeline licensing; and WorkSafe, Energy Safe and EPA have roles depending on the particular activity'.[69]

The Committee heard that across all these areas, Resources Victoria 'work cooperatively with [their] co-regulators and with other agencies to support consistent, risk-based and effective regulatory outcomes'.[70] Resources Victoria emphasised that it's 'role is to facilitate responsible resource development while protecting the environment, communities and public safety'.[71]

WorkSafe Victoria is the State's workplace health and safety regulator and workers compensation insurer.[72] WorkSafe stated this gives it dual purposes 'to reduce workplace harm and to improve outcomes for injured workers'.[73] WorkSafe explained that it will oversee the safe handling of decommissioned materials at Barry Beach, which includes management of hazardous substances, heavy lifting, transport, and worker safety, together with ensuring proper training and licensing.[74]

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68 Linda Bibby, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 33.

69 Ibid.

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.

72 Sam Jenkin, Chief Health and Safety Officer, WorkSafe, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence,* pp. 22–23.

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is Victoria's independent environmental regulator, responsible for protecting human health and the environment from pollution and waste.[75] EPA ensures that risks of harm are properly 'identified assessed, controlled, and monitored' under general environmental duty requirements.[76] This also includes 'consideration of hierarchy of controls, the industry state of knowledge and what is reasonably practicable in managing and controlling those risks'.[77] EPA also manages approvals for onshore transfer activities, advises on planning permits, and can deploy pollution response teams in state coastal waters.[78] In addition, it 'regulates waste management … through the application of the waste management hierarchy', prioritising 'recovery and recycling, safe transfer and disposal of non-recoverable waste'.[79]

Energy Safe Victoria (ESV) is the state's independent regulator for electricity, gas, and pipelines.[80] However, as discussed in Chapter 1, this report focuses on offshore decommissioning, which limits discussion about ESV's role as it regulates onshore gas infrastructure.[81]

4.3.1 Resources Victoria's regulatory approach

Resources Victoria 'apply a risk-based regulatory approach and work closely with our co-regulators to ensure decommissioning is completed safely and effectively when production ends'.[82] They emphasised that the 'obligation to complete decommissioning rests with industry', stating that 'Operators must comply with legislative and regulatory requirements'.[83]

The Committee heard that Resources Victoria works with NOPSEMA as their 'co-regulators and have regular interaction with them to ensure … regulatory continuity and complementarity'.[84] They indicated that this arrangement has been 'effective to date', stating that no 'practical gaps with the legislative and regulatory arrangements' have been discovered.[85]

Within their jurisdiction, Resources Victoria regulates decommissioning 'as part of petroleum operations', explaining that 'decommissioning planning must be undertaken during the earlier stages of operations, approvals and consents for decommissioning

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75 Dan Hunt, Director Regional Victoria, Operations Division, Environment Protection Authority Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 22.

76 Ibid.

77 Ibid.

78 Ibid.

79 Ibid.

80 Energy Safe Victoria, *Submission 102,* p. 1.

81 Ibid.

82 Linda Bibby, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 33.

83 Ibid.

84 Ibid., p. 36.

85 Ibid., p. 41.

are required and noncompliance with decommissioning obligations can be enforced'.[86] They asserted that the regulatory regime so far 'has been effective' and they identified 'no practical gaps for [the] Victorian waters component'.[87]

Don Hough, Principal, Energy Infrastructure Regulation at DEECA outlined ExxonMobil's communication efforts with the Department, noting that they receive updates 'formally as government officials' along with 'regular updates that are sent out through the community at large'. Resources Victoria described it's engagement with ExxonMobil as 'professional and robust'.[88]

Resources Victoria described what it viewed as the key risks for Victoria arising from the decommissioning process:

- The environmental impact of decommissioning pipelines where a full removal approach is applied.[89]
- 'Making sure the pipeline is properly purged and cleaned prior to any decision whether it is to remain in situ or be removed'.[90]

Resources Victoria outlined its monitoring regime for decommissioned wells in Victorian waters, noting it began a monitoring program after the moratorium on onshore gas exploration ended.[91] The regulator said it continues to implement this program 'as part of [its] normal regulatory activities' to detect fugitive emissions. It noted that inspections of all the existing wells 'did not find any fugitive emissions'.[92]. The regulator uses specialised cameras to monitor and inspect wells, with inspections carried out on a 'case-by-case basis' under the risk-based approach.[93]

Resources Victoria stated that 'emissions from petroleum operations in Commonwealth waters that are offshore from Victoria are attributed to Victoria in the National Greenhouse Accounts'.[94] This includes emissions from facilities, wells and pipelines.[95] Evidence noted that emissions 'are calculated in line with Australia's obligations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement'.[96]

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86 Linda Bibby, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 33.

87 Ibid.

88 Don Hough, Principal, Energy Infrastructure Regulation, Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 35.

89 Ibid., p. 34.

90 Ibid.

91 Sandra O'Farrell, Manager, Petroleum Authorisations, Resources Victoria, Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence,* pp. 35, 40.

92 Ibid., p. 40.

93 Ibid., p. 34.

94 Sandra O'Farrell, Manager, Petroleum Authorisations, Resources Victoria, Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, response to questions on noticed received 27 March 2026, p. 3.

95 Ibid.

96 Ibid.

Resources Victoria described compliance actions it can take as part of its regulatory powers to 'ensure decommissioning is completed to a satisfactory standard'.[97] Linda Bibby explained that decommissioning planning is included in the operators' environmental plans, which must be approved by the regulator and are subsequently monitored for compliance.[98] She elaborated further on the scope of the regulators compliance powers:

> we have powers to issue remedial directions to both current and former title holders, and we can direct removal and management of property, capping and sealing wells, conservation of the environment and remediation of damage. We can also refuse to accept surrender of a title, and direct title holders to hold insurance and so forth. If somebody is unable, the minister can step in and do that work and then any infrastructure left in place, for example, can be removed and sold and then becomes a debt that can be chased in court.[99]

4.3.2 The Environment Protection Authority's regulatory approach

Dan Hunt, Director of Regional Victoria Area Operations at the EPA, described the Agency's regulatory approach as 'a mix of encouragement and deterrence', which 'aims to motivate action and improve outcomes for the community and the environment'.[100] This approach was described as 'a mix of outcomes based duties to manage risks of harm and waste and an approvals framework for specific activities'.[101]

The Committee heard that if pipelines are decommissioned and left in situ, the licence holder remains responsible for their maintenance and must continue to minimise risks as far as reasonably practicable.[102] The EPA confirmed that the 'general environmental duty still applies' even after licences are handed back.[103] Dan Hunt affirmed to the Committee that if the licence holder exists, 'then yes, the general environmental duty applies. They are the duty holder under the legislation in terms of it is their asset'.[104]

Dan Hunt spoke to the Committee about the EPA's management of contaminants, noting that certain hazardous wastes, such as mercury or NORMs, are classified as reportable priority waste and are subject to strict legal controls.[105] Evidence stated that the waste producer, waste transporter, and waste receiver all have obligations to track, notify, and ensure that waste is safely and lawfully disposed of, noting that higher obligations come with different types of waste.[106] The Committee heard

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97 Linda Bibby, *Transcript of evidence,* pp. 36–37.

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid.

100 Dan Hunt, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 22.

101 Ibid.

102 Ibid., p. 24.

103 Ibid.

104 Ibid., p. 25.

105 Ibid., p. 28.

106 Ibid.

that disposal must occur at approved licensed facilities in Victoria or, if necessary, interstate.[107]

Dan Hunt noted that ExxonMobil would be considered the waste producer in the context of onshore decommissioning activities.[108]

NORMs are primarily regulated by the Department of Health's radiation unit, while EPA regulates it if it is classified as reportable priority waste.[109] Evidence noted that EPA-licensed A01 facilities manage high-risk waste and are regularly inspected.[110] The Committee heard that if NORMs are treated as reportable priority waste, responsibility is shared across the waste producer, waste transporter, and waste receiver, who must ensure safe, lawful handling and disposal.[111] Dan Hunt explained that the Department of Health is involved in radiation oversight and coordination and WorkSafe may also engage depending on transport and safety requirements.[112] Duty holders change depending on the stage of handling, but multiple agencies may be involved throughout the management of NORMs.[113]

The EPA determines whether material is classified as reportable priority waste based on its composition, particularly if it contains hazardous substances, rather than volume.[114] Hazardous materials are automatically included, while less hazardous waste is treated differently.[115] Regulation is enforced through licensing and permissions, where companies must detail what materials they are handling and how they will manage them.[116] Dan Hunt stated that EPA assesses these plans, sets strict conditions, and conducts regular inspections to ensure compliance with environmental obligations and the general environmental duty.[117]

Dan Hunt expressed confidence in EPA's capability and capacity to effectively regulate and monitor work during the onshore decommissioning process, noting that 'there is a high level of rigour', where EPA have:[118]

- 'a duties-based Act that is akin to WorkSafe legislation'
- 'an entire department of scientists that are able to support the work'
- an auditor framework which allows them to request audits of a duty holder in terms of their consultant's work or any reports that they provide to EPA.[119]

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107 Ibid.
108 Ibid., p. 29.
109 Ibid.
110 Ibid.
111 Ibid.
112 Ibid.
113 Ibid.
114 Ibid., p. 30.
115 Ibid.
116 Ibid.
117 Ibid.
118 Ibid., p. 31.
119 Ibid., p. 32.

According to EPA Victoria's compliance and enforcement database, it confirmed to the Committee 'that Esso has not had any major incidents or incidents, in the last decade'.[120]

Dan Hunt told the Committee that there is no 'legal obligation on NOPSEMA or others to notify EPA' in the event that there was an environmental incident, noting that 'they may still do' regardless.[121] The Committee heard that there have been discussions between EPA and NOPSEMA about the 'need to establish an MOU for those purposes' and to enhance 'information sharing, even if it is purely for visibility or advisory' purposes.[122]

The Environmental Protection Agency expressed strong confidence in its ability to regulate and monitor onshore decommissioning in Victoria.

4.3.3 WorkSafe's regulatory approach

WorkSafe's regulatory approach requires employers and other duty holders to manage risks by identifying hazards and controlling them.[123] The Committee was told that Victoria's system is more prescriptive for hazardous substances compared to the offshore framework, highlighting requirements for labelling, safety data sheets, monitoring, and health surveillance. All of which will apply once materials arrive at Barry Beach Marine Terminal.[124]

WorkSafe expressed confidence that the regulatory approach for State and Commonwealth regulators will be consistent.[125] The organisation noted that 'this consistency will be supported by the memorandum of understanding between WorkSafe and NOPSEMA, which supports cooperation on OH&S matters of mutual interest'.[126]

WorkSafe's focus includes safe handling of hazardous materials, transport and dismantling of heavy infrastructure, traffic management, and ensuring contractors are properly trained and licensed for asbestos and high-risk work.[127] It will also work alongside EPA on waste management and support safe, coordinated onshore operations.[128]

Chief Health and Safety Officer for WorkSafe, Sam Jenkin explained that asbestos may be present in ageing pipes and infrastructure brought onshore during

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120 Dan Hunt, Director, Operations, Regional Victoria, Environment Protection Authority Victori, response to questions on notice received 27 March 2026, p. 2.

121 Dan Hunt, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 28.

122 Ibid.

123 Sam Jenkin, *Transcript of evidence,* pp. 22–23.

124 Ibid.

125 Ibid., p. 23.

126 Ibid.

127 Ibid.

128 Ibid.

decommissioning.[129] The Committee heard that before materials land at Barry Beach Marine Terminal, regulators would review duty holders' asbestos registers to identify any friable or non-friable asbestos and ensure it is safely managed and directed into the appropriate waste stream.[130]

Qube is the company that operates Barry Beach Marine Terminal on behalf of Esso and ExxonMobil. WorkSafe stated that it regularly engages with Qube as part of its routine oversight and emphasised that it was not aware of any major, recent incidents involving them that would raise concerns about work, health or safety.[131] Evidence noted that Qube is a large logistics provider and known duty holder, and WorkSafe monitors it through both 'proactive and reactive regulatory activities'.[132]

Confidence in Qube's operations was also echoed by Gippsland Ports Chief Executive Officer, Chris Waites, who described Qube as 'professional and aboveboard' in all dealings, stating that Gippsland Ports has 'no concern about how Qube operates the facility'.[133] Chris Waites also expressed confidence in the legislative and regulatory controls to manage emerging issues, noting that enforcement will depend on the resourcing of relevant State Government agencies.[134]

WorkSafe spoke to the Committee about its early engagement with NOPSEMA, which has allowed it time to prepare for decommissioning work at Barry Beach Marine Terminal.[135] Sam Jenkin emphasised that involvement in the decommissioning process at this early stage has provided the regulator 'with an opportunity to work with impacted stakeholders and workforces to ensure the appropriate health and safety systems are in place.'[136]

The regulator stated that it will work with workforces carrying out decommissioning works to understand and to identify risks posed by the activities occurring at Barry Beach Marine Terminal.[137] WorkSafe noted that it will also 'engage the contractors and others that are involved in the process to ensure that they have the health and safety processes in place'.[138] The regulator noted this type of work has been done elsewhere, allowing lessons to be applied locally, particularly around traffic management and onshoring activities.[139]

WorkSafe stated that Victoria's *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* is broad enough to regulate decommissioning activities across the state and ensure worker

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129 Ibid., p. 25.

130 Ibid.

131 Ibid., p. 26.

132 Ibid.

133 Chris Waites, Chief Executive Officer, Gippsland Ports, public hearing, Leongatha, 11 February 2026, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 13.

134 Ibid., p. 13.

135 Sam Jenkin, *Transcript of evidence,* pp. 26–27.

136 Ibid.

137 Ibid., p. 26.

138 Ibid.

139 Ibid.

and environmental safety.[140] Sam Jenkin told the Committee that potential hazards, including asbestos and other substances from offshore infrastructure, should be known in advance, allowing appropriate controls to be put in place.[141] WorkSafe also noted it will coordinate with other regulators, including EPA, NOPSEMA, and the Department of Health, to manage risks such as NORM, and expressed confidence that the existing framework is sufficient.[142]

WorkSafe considers Victorian legislation is broad and sufficient to manage decommissioning risks, including hazardous substances like asbestos. WorkSafe is engaged with NOPSEMA to proactively prepare for onshore decommissioning at Barry Beach Marine Terminal.

4.4 Stakeholder concerns about the onshore regulatory framework

4.4.1 Management of onshore environmental risks

Stakeholders expressed that Victoria's onshore regulatory framework must be rigorous and well-resourced to monitor and regulate decommissioning activity.[143] Evidence noted that this is essential for managing risks such as post-abandonment leaks and hazardous contaminants.[144]

The CODA expressed that effective decommissioning in Victoria requires an effective regulatory system at the State level, which includes 'fit for purpose laws and regulations' alongside 'fully resourced and trained personnel' to oversee them.[145] CODA stressed the importance of fully resourced and staffed regulatory agencies, particularly 'as the volume of decommissioning increases in Victoria'.[146] CODA recommended that the Victorian Government ensure that 'regulatory agencies are fully resourced and staffed to deal with processing applications and managing work in a timely and technically sound manner'.[147]

Dr Francis Norman, Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director at CODA, emphasised that the Victorian Government should ensure that regulators are well-resourced to oversee onshore decommissioning activities. He noted that this would strengthen Victoria's ability to monitor and address risks such as

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140 Ibid., p. 27.

141 Ibid.

142 Ibid.

143 Centre of Decommissioning Australia, *Submission 34,* p. 11; Dr Tom Cresswell, Researcher, Ecotoxicology and Radioecology, Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 17.

144 Centre of Decommissioning Australia, *Submission 34,* pp. 9–11; Environment Victoria, *Submission 118,* pp. 4–5; Dr Francis Norman, Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director, Centre of Decommissioning Australia, public hearing, Melbourne, 10 December 2025, *Transcript of evidence,* pp. 31–32, 39; Dr Tom Cresswell, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 14.

145 Centre of Decommissioning Australia, *Submission 34,* p. 11.

146 Ibid., p. 9.

147 Ibid.

post-abandonment leakages and orphan wells.[148] These risks are sources of fugitive emissions, and effective monitoring is critical to ensuring that the State reaches its net zero emissions targets.[149]

Dr Tom Cresswell, Researcher, Ecotoxicology and Radioecology for Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation, explained that for in situ decommissioning, contaminants like NORM and mercury must be carefully assessed using risk frameworks, with ongoing research to address knowledge gaps. He noted that if infrastructure is removed onshore, managing contamination remains critical, particularly to prevent hazardous substances from being released during processes and to ensure safe disposal of concentrated waste.[150]

Dr Tom Cresswell emphasised that any offshore production infrastructure that is brought onshore must be properly assessed to identify any hazardous materials like NORM or mercury.[151] Where contaminants are present, they need to be carefully removed through a structured decontamination process so that materials like steel can be safely recycled within a circular economy.[152]

Offshore Fossil Fuel Campaigner for Friends of the Earth Melbourne, Stanley Woodhouse expressed concerns about existing soil and groundwater contamination at the Barry Beach Marine Terminal site. He emphasised the need for strong EPA oversight and testing, proper worker agreements, and robust environmental protections to ensure adequate protection to the surrounding environment.[153]

In a public hearing, residents of South Gippsland, Anda Banikos, Zavier Evans, and Nola Kelly expressed significant concerns regarding the environmental, social, and economic impacts of oil and gas decommissioning in Gippsland.[154] Both Nola Kelly and Zavier Evans expressed awareness of hydrocarbon spills in the preceding 18 months from Esso.[155] Nola Kelly called for strict monitoring of onshore works at Barry Beach Marine Terminal to ensure no resultant pollution or health risks to workers.[156] While Anda Banikos expressed concern that industry workers may be discouraged from reporting poor practices due to fear of losing employment, and called for whistleblower protections to ensure 'proper adherence to all safety and environmental regulations'.[157]

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148 Dr Francis Norman, *Transcript of evidence,* pp. 31–32, 39.

149 Centre of Decommissioning Australia, *Submission 34,* pp. 9–11; Environment Victoria, *Submission 118,* pp. 4–5.

150 Dr Tom Cresswell, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 14.

151 Ibid., p. 17.

152 Ibid.

153 Stanley Woodhouse, Offshore Fossil Fuel Campaigner, Friends of the Earth Melbourne, public hearing, Melbourne, 10 December 2025, *Transcript of evidence,* pp. 20–21.

154 Anda Banikos, public hearing, Leongatha, 11 February 2026, *Transcript of evidence,* pp. 29–32; Zavier Evans, public hearing, Leongatha, 11 February 2026, *Transcript of evidence,* pp. 29–32; Nola Kelly, public hearing, Leongatha, 11 February 2026, *Transcript of evidence,* pp. 29–32.

155 Nola Kelly, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 32; Zavier Evans, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 32; Zavier Evans, Inquiry into Decommissioning Oil and Gas Infrastructure hearing, response to questions on notice received 15 February 2026, p. 2.

156 Nola Kelly, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 31.

157 Anda Banikos, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 30.

South Gippsland residents raised concerns and called for stronger monitoring and compliance measures to ensure the oil and gas industry meets safety and environmental standards for decommissioning.

FINDING 25: Both offshore and onshore decommissioning must include rigorous identification, decontamination, and safe disposal of hazardous materials, such as NORMs and mercury, to protect ecosystems, enable safe recycling, and prevent environmental harm.

FINDING 26: Effective onshore decommissioning in Victoria requires that state regulators are fully resourced and adequately staffed to monitor risks (including from fugitive emissions) and ensure compliance, particularly as the volume of decommissioning increases in Victoria.

RECOMMENDATION 10: That the Victorian Government ensure that State regulators, including the Environmental Protection Agency, WorkSafe and Resources Victoria are adequately resourced with appropriate staffing capability to support strong environmental and occupational safety outcomes for onshore decommissioning in Victoria.

RECOMMENDATION 11: That the Victorian Government review environmental standards, oversight and enforcement measures regarding decommissioning to ensure they enable rigorous identification, decontamination, and safe disposal of hazardous materials including NORMs and mercury and prevent environmental harm.

4.4.2 Ensuring effective coordination of regulatory agencies

Stakeholders called for clearer roles, stronger coordination, and more streamlined regulatory processes for onshore decommissioning in Victoria.[158] The Committee heard that coordination and regulatory clarity across regulatory agencies and jurisdictions would strengthen onshore decommissioning outcomes.[159]

The MUA's submission emphasised that Victoria's regulatory agencies and the Victorian Ports Corporation play 'critical roles in ensuring that dismantling, processing and recycling are conducted safely and in compliance with environmental and industrial standards'.[160] However, the Union suggested that the State's role

158 ExxonMobil Australia, *Submission* 137, p. 2; Maritime Union of Australia, *Submission 156*, p. 11; Angie Moore, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 3; Jason Medd, Director, Offshore and Decommissioning, Australian Energy Producers, public hearing, Melbourne, 10 December 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 10–11; Dr Francis Norman, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 31–32; Professor Robert Melchers, Fellow, Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering, public hearing, Melbourne, 10 December 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 46.

159 ExxonMobil Australia, *Submission* 137, p. 2; Jason Medd, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 10–11; Dr Francis Norman, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 31–32; Professor Robert Melchers, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 46.

160 Maritime Union of Australia, *Submission 156*, p. 11.

'in decommissioning is underdeveloped and inconsistently exercised', while Commonwealth regulation is 'heavily centralised' and 'fails to intervene until after deterioration or non-compliance has occurred'.[161]

The MUA recommended creating a Victorian Decommissioning Regulatory Framework to clarify State agency roles, enable stronger State Government action when needed and improve coordination with Commonwealth bodies.[162] It also proposed 'establishing default intervention powers' such as:

- 'Emergency environmental intervention powers such as extending the EPA's authority to act immediately where offshore or nearshore petroleum infrastructure poses a pollution risk'.[163]
- 'State-led clean-up and cost recovery would empower the Victorian Government to perform urgent remediation where an operator defaults or becomes insolvent, and to recover costs from responsible corporations'.[164]
- 'Targeted regulatory intervention would allow the state to declare heightened regulatory oversight in areas where repeated non-compliance has occurred'.[165]
- 'Mandatory notification and transparency requirements would require operators to notify both NOPSEMA and the Victorian Government of any environmental or safety breach'.[166]

Additionally, the Union indicated that the framework should align with circular economy goals by ensuring materials are recycled within Victoria. It also called for the establishment of a dedicated 'Decommissioning Coordination Unit' within the DEECA to centralise oversight, coordination, and policy implementation.[167]

Angie Moore emphasised that while the state is responsible for regulating onshore facilities, the key challenge is ensuring these responsibilities are carried out in a coordinated and transparent way as decommissioning activity grows.[168]

Similarly, Dr Kylie Walker, Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering (ATSE), called for a state-level centralised decommissioning knowledge hub to consolidate information on standards, regulations, best practices, and infrastructure inventory.[169] ATSE indicated that a state-based body would ensure local opportunities are not overlooked and produce a comprehensive

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161 Ibid.

162 Ibid.

163 Ibid.

164 Ibid.

165 Ibid., p. 12.

166 Ibid.

167 Ibid.

168 Angie Moore, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 3.

169 Dr Kylie Walker, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering, public hearing, Melbourne, 10 December 2025, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 42.

inventory of waste streams, supporting the development of a circular economy.[170] Evidence expressed that it would also enable collaboration between industry, government, and academia. It could also strengthen interstate and international partnerships.[171] Dr Kylie Walker noted that the Commonwealth Government has made efforts to partner 'with mature decommissioning industries', including 'a bilateral agreement with the UK to cooperate on areas like supply chains, knowledge, skills, regulations and financing'.[172]

Similarly, Australian Energy Producers stated that the Victorian Government should focus on 'streamlined approvals, clear interfaces with the Commonwealth and support for local capability' for infrastructure that falls within the State Government's jurisdiction. This includes 'ports, coastal interfaces, onshore processing and waste facilities'.[173] The submission recommended that Victoria 'clarify interfaces between state and Commonwealth jurisdiction, including with respect to State waters and onshore infrastructure'.[174]

The Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis stated that effective coordination across government bodies is necessary, and creating a dedicated office could improve oversight, streamline decision-making, and increase transparency.[175] The Institute also noted the regulators should coordinate where issues overlap, exemplifying that WorkSafe manages hazardous substances, while environmental pollution and waste fall under DEECA.[176]

CODA also recommended that 'Victorian government regulatory agencies open discussions with other state and territory regulators, most particularly SA, WA, Qld and NT'.[177] CODA noted that these jurisdictions are 'navigating their regulatory frameworks to ensure financial coverage for decommissioning.[178]

ExxonMobil stated in its submission to the Committee that Australia's 'decommissioning industry benefits from a robust regulatory framework involving a number of federal, state and local government bodies and independent regulators'.[179] ExxonMobil argued that the industry would benefit from a 'streamlined regulatory environment and approval process' together with 'clarity on community consultation requirements', stating that this would improve outcomes for decommissioning projects.[180]

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170 Ibid.

171 Ibid.

172 Ibid.

173 Australian Energy Producers, *Submission 140,* p. 1.

174 Ibid., p. 2.

175 Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis, *Submission 134,* p. 7.

176 Ibid.

177 Centre of Decommissioning Australia, *Submission 34,* p. 9.

178 Ibid.

179 ExxonMobil Australia, *Submission 137,* p. 2.

180 Ibid.

Industry, union and academic stakeholders identified the need for a coordinated Victorian decommissioning framework or dedicated coordination body to improve oversight, transparency, regulatory efficiency and collaboration across government, industry, and academia.

RECOMMENDATION 12: That the Victorian Government establish a coordinated state-level decommissioning framework, with clear Departmental accountabilities, to strengthen collaboration between industry, unions, academics, regulatory agencies and the Commonwealth Government for onshore decommissioning.

4.5 Consultation on decommissioning

Resources Victoria noted that the Federal Court made two rulings concerning consultation on offshore petroleum projects:

- The 2022 ruling, Tipakalippa v National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority (No 2) [2022], set the benchmark for appropriate consultation regarding activities described in environment plans.
- The 2023 ruling, Cooper v National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority (No 2) [2023], set the benchmark for appropriate consultation to have been completed before a decision is made on environment plans.

Resources Victoria explained that 'consultation must be comprehensive and involve meaningful engagement with Traditional Owners, local industry, and the broader community who may be impacted by operations'.[181]

Evidence stated that requirements for consultation are set out in Victorian OPGGS Regulations 13D and 13F, which state that 'titleholders must consider all feedback and include additional controls to mitigate the matters raised where appropriate'.[182]

4.5.1 Community consultation in decommissioning: ExxonMobil's engagement in South Gippsland

The Committee received evidence about ExxonMobil's engagement with the South Gippsland Shire Council and its local communities. Cr Nathan Hersey expressed that 'Community confidence in decommissioning' is essential and emphasised that 'continued openness and responsiveness will be critical as the works proceed'.[183]

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181 Resources Victoria, Inquiry into Decommissioning Oil and Gas Infrastructure hearing, response to questions on notice received 27 March 2026, pp. 2–3.

182 Ibid p. 3.

183 Cr Nathan Hersey, Mayor, South Gippsland Shire Council, public hearing, Leongatha, 11 February 2026, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 21.

South Gippsland Shire Council stated that 'Esso has been very good in engaging with council' on their decommissioning project.[184] The Council recognised ExxonMobil's efforts 'to engage regularly with council to hold community information sessions and provide opportunities for direct feedback'.[185]

Cr Nathan Hersey emphasised that 'Strong environmental safeguards, clear planning and framework and ongoing community engagement are essential to ensure the long-term social licence' of decommissioning projects in South Gippsland.[186] Evidence identified South Gippsland's 'sensitive coastal and marine environments' and stressed that impacts from port activity must be mitigated.[187]

South Gippsland Shire Council stated that council and community both 'need a seat at the table' to help direct investment for decommissioning projects, but this requires leadership from the State Government to ensure that council and community have this opportunity.[188] Evidence contended that local governments are well placed to engage with people and communicate issues back to the State Government, highlighting the importance of engagement between the State and local governments.[189]

Evidence indicated that community expects that it 'will be central to decisions and to ways in which benefit is given to community' and stressed that decisions which impact people should be decided by those people.[190] The Committee heard that a forum where the State Government, councils, industry and community could engage on decision-making about decommissioning projects would support council to ensure that benefits are 'realised locally'.[191]

The Committee heard from South Gippsland residents Nola Kelly, Anda Banikos and Zavier Evans, who collectively called for greater transparency around decommissioning activities to improve community engagement.[192] Zavier Evans advocated for greater information transparency, including requiring to publish 'georeferenced maps of their entire network'.[193] While Anda Banikos proposed a 'public register of oil and gas infrastructure' detailing ownership, decommissioning responsibilities, costs, and required completion dates.[194]

Nola Kelly stated that she had 'attended an information session conducted by ExxonMobil' and expressed scepticism about the company's financial commitment to decommissioning. This scepticism was echoed by Zavier Evans, who stated that

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184 Ibid.

185 Ibid.

186 Ibid.

187 Ibid.

188 Ibid., p. 28.

189 Ibid., pp. 27–28.

190 Ibid., p. 28.

191 Ibid.

192 Anda Banikos, *Submission 50,* p. 1; Nola Kelly, *Submission 81,* p. 1; Zavier Evans, *Submission 133,* p. 1; Anda Banikos, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 30; Zavier Evans, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 32; Nola Kelly, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 31.

193 Zavier Evans *Transcript of evidence,* p. 32.

194 Anda Banikos, *Transcript of evidence,* pp. 30, 36.

ExxonMobil motivation is 'to reduce their costs'.[195] Nola Kelly said that the community needs to be fully informed throughout the decommissioning process, warning that without ongoing transparency and oversight, issues may go unnoticed until serious consequences emerge.[196]

Anda Banikos further suggested that engagement with community observations could form part of formal government compliance oversight in South Gippsland.[197] Other stakeholders also called for a public register of offshore and onshore oil and gas infrastructure to improve transparency and accountability.[198] This could improve engagement with the community about the decommissioning process and strengthen confidence.

FINDING 27: There needs to be more collaboration, engagement and leadership from the Victorian Government to ensure that local communities benefit from oil and gas decommissioning projects.

FINDING 28: There needs to be greater transparency and public access to information on offshore oil and gas infrastructure and decommissioning processes, and increased community involvement to strengthen community engagement.

RECOMMENDATION 13: That the Victorian Government establish a forum to engage with industry, unions, local governments and communities about decommissioning projects risks and opportunities.

RECOMMENDATION 14: That the Victorian Government strengthen community engagement and work with industry and Commonwealth agencies to provide the public with information on oil and gas infrastructure networks and regular updates on onshore and offshore decommissioning activities. This should include clear pathways for the public to raise concerns or questions about decommissioning activities.

4.5.2 Strengthening Traditional Owner acknowledgement and consultation

The Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC) stated that decommissioning activities should support 'healing and long-term protection of Gunaikurnai Country'.[199] It highlighted that offshore oil and gas activities 'have

195 Zavier Evans *Transcript of evidence,* p. 38.

196 Nola Kelly, *Submission 81,* p. 1.

197 Anda Banikos, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 30.

198 The Wilderness Society, *Submission 148,* p. 7; Maritime Union of Australia, *Submission 156,* pp. 8–9.

199 Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation, *Submission 164,* p. 1.

historically impacted Gunaikurnai lands and seas' as well as caused 'cumulative cultural, environmental, and social harm' without delivering benefits to Gunaikurnai people.[200] Evidence noted that decommissioning is an opportunity to address these inequities by embedding Traditional Owner leadership and ensuring outcomes support cultural, ecological, and community wellbeing across 'Katungal (Sea Country) and Wurruk (land)'.[201]

GLaWAC's submission emphasised that 'Gunaikurnai are rights-holders, not stakeholders'. They called for 'transparent, well-resourced and ongoing' engagement throughout all stages of decommissioning, including representation in planning, decision-making, regulation and emergency response.[202] The submission argued for 'full access to technical and environmental data' and active participation in governance processes for Gunaikurnai people,[203] and that GLaWAC Rangers be integrated into marine and coastal monitoring and incident response activities.[204]

GLaWAC highlighted that offshore oil and gas activities have significantly affected Gunaikurnai cultural heritage, including 'submerged cultural landscapes'.[205] The submission called for decommissioning activities to prioritise protection, restoration, and rehabilitation of cultural values using Gunaikurnai knowledge and authority.[206] This includes recognising Land and Sea Country as interconnected cultural landscapes, conducting thorough heritage assessments, avoiding harm to sensitive sites and ensuring any restoration work is led by Gunaikurnai people.[207]

GLaWAC emphasised that its legally recognised rights, interests, and cultural obligations across Gunaikurnai Country must be fully respected in decommissioning processes. This includes native title and settlement agreements.[208] The submission stated that offshore activities directly affect Sea Country and related management areas, so Gunaikurnai rights should be embedded into regulatory frameworks and industry practices. This should be in line with principles such as free, prior and informed consent and long-term caring for Country.[209]

Evidence demonstrated strong support for meaningful acknowledgement and consultation of Traditional Owners in Victoria's onshore decommissioning projects.[210] Cr Nathan Hersey stated that South Gippsland Shire Council strongly supports traditional owners acknowledgement, consultation and employment, noting that the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation and the Bunurong Land Council

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200 Ibid.

201 Ibid.

202 Ibid., pp. 1–2.

203 Ibid.

204 Ibid.

205 Ibid., p. 2.

206 Ibid.

207 Ibid.

208 Ibid.

209 Ibid.

210 Cr Nathan Hersey, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 21; Centre of Decommissioning Australia, *Submission 34,* p. 10.

Aboriginal Corporation have responsibilities for Country and Sea Country in South Gippsland 'that may be affected by oil and gas infrastructure'.[211]

The Centre of Decommissioning Australia told the Committee that 'there are real and meaningful opportunities for Traditional Owner involvement in the consultation in decommissioning'.[212] CODA's submission emphasised that decommissioning represents a 'restoration of land and sea and the views of traditional owners of these locations should be considered in decisions'.[213]

Similarly, the MUA identified First Nations partnership as a critical principle for a successful decommissioning industry in Victoria.[214] The Union emphasised the need to embed Traditional Owner authority, identifying 'Sea Country co-governance and the Victorian Treaty process' as key pathways to achieve this.[215]

The Union's submission recommended integrating decommissioning and offshore energy into Victoria's Treaty framework to support environmental remediation and 'self-determination in marine management'.[216] It called for formal recognition of 'Traditional Owner authority and Sea Country rights', alignment of governance arrangements with the Treaty process and stronger and broader partnerships with Traditional Owner corporations 'to support Victoria's decommissioning and offshore energy transition'.[217]

FINDING 29: Meaningful acknowledgement and consultation with Traditional Owner groups in Victoria requires that Traditional Owner rights, authority and knowledge are embedded within Victorian governance frameworks and decision-making processes for onshore and offshore decommissioning activities.

FINDING 30: Traditional Owner acknowledgement and consultation for decommissioning activities should enable long-term partnerships that extend beyond consultation to shared governance and participation in environmental outcomes.

RECOMMENDATION 15: That the Victorian Government embed Traditional Owner leadership, knowledge and authority within Victorian governance and regulatory frameworks including Victoria's Treaty process, to support self-determination and long-term cultural and environmental stewardship of Sea Country.

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211 Cr Nathan Hersey, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 21.

212 Centre of Decommissioning Australia, *Submission 34,* p. 10.

213 Ibid.

214 Maritime Union of Australia, *Submission 156,* p. 21.

215 Ibid.

216 Ibid., pp. 17–21.

217 Ibid.

Chapter 5
Capitalising on opportunities for workforce and industry

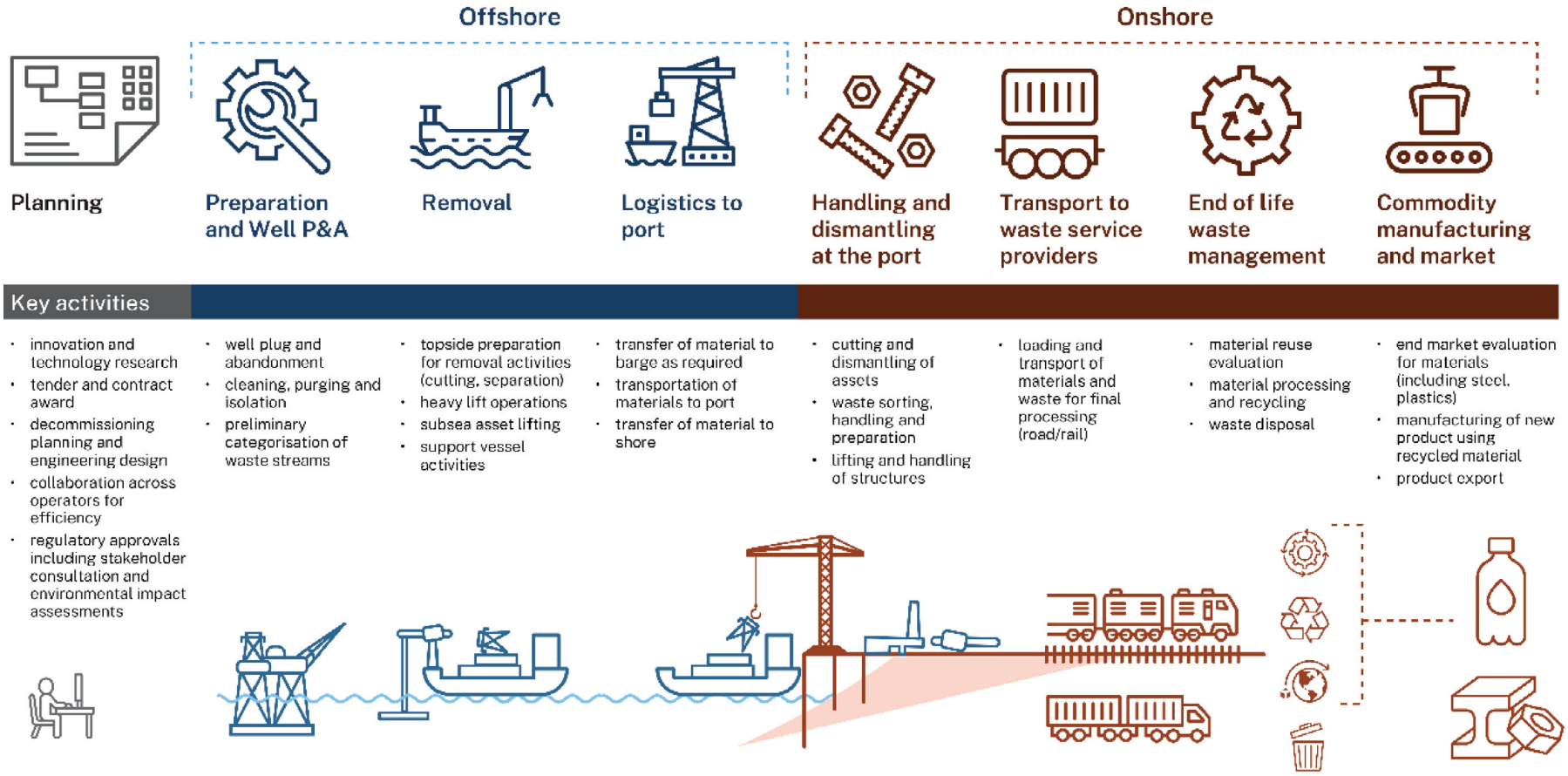
5.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 discussed the policy and regulatory settings informing onshore decommissioning in Victoria. Chapter 5 builds on this by examining how Victoria can capitalise on decommissioning to benefit its workforce and domestic industries. It explores how new industries can be developed from decommissioning activity and how the workforce can be supported through transition, including transferring the skills and knowledge needed to participate in emerging industries.

As discussed in both Chapter 2 and Chapter 4, The Victorian Government's approach to decommissioning refers to the 'planning and permitting for the removal of structures, well plugging and abandonment, removal of structures, transport to ports and onshore processing'.[1] Figure 5.1 depicts the complete decommissioning value chain according to *Australia's Offshore Resources Decommissioning Roadmap*, noting the onshore and offshore components of the value chain.

1 Linda Bibby, Executive Director of Earth Resources Policy and Programs, Resources Victoria, Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 34.

Figure 5.1 Australia's offshore oil and gas decommissioning value chain



Source; Department of Industry, Science and Resources, *Australia's Offshore Resources Decommissioning Roadmap*, p. 5.

5.2 Developing Victoria's decommissioning supply chain

The Committee heard that Victoria could capitalise on onshore decommissioning by developing a Victorian decommissioning supply chain, which will create 'genuine economic participation for traditional owners and local communities'.[2]

Professor of Energy and Resources Law at Macquarie University, Tina Soliman-Hunter stated that Norway is considered the 'gold standard' for decommissioning.[3] This is because its framework takes a comprehensive, end-to-end system approach, outlining both the removal process and the handling of infrastructure onshore.[4] The plans should clearly specify where materials will go, why, and how long the process will take. She noted that while the Commonwealth Government defines decommissioning as 'taking it out … the question remains: what do we do with it when it is out and onshore?'.[5]

According to the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering (ATSE), Victoria accounts for 9% of disposal demand, and has 3 recycling and disposal facilities in the State. These enable a recycling and disposal capacity of 410,000 tonnes per annum.[6] ATSE noted that 'disposal demand volume will be substantially reduced if in situ decommissioning alternatives are accepted for facility components such as export pipelines or concrete structures'.[7]

5.2.1 Challenges for developing the supply chain

Dr Francis Norman, Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director, Centre of Decommissioning Australia (CODA) spoke to the Committee about how Victoria can strengthen its capabilities and capacity across its decommissioning supply chain.[8] The Committee heard limited domestic port infrastructure and a requirement for specialised expertise impacts its ability to domestically process decommissioned infrastructure.[9] However, most components such as pipelines, topsides, and substructures are being processed within Australia.[10]

The Committee heard that recycling capacity is uneven across Australia, with infrastructure often far from offshore sites. However, Victoria is relatively well positioned because of the proximity of recycling facilities to the oil and gas infrastructure set for decommissioning.[11] There are challenges in recycling all recovered

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2 Jason Medd, Director, Offshore and Decommissioning, Australian Energy Producers, public hearing, 10 December 2025, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 11.

3 Professor Tina Soliman-Hunter, Energy and Resources Law, Macquarie Law School, Macquarie University, public hearing, Melbourne, 10 December 2025, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 2.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering, *Submission 39,* p. 10.

7 Ibid.

8 Dr Francis Norman, Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director, Centre of Decommissioning Australia, public hearing, Melbourne, 10 December 2026, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 30.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

materials.[12] High-grade stainless steel may still be exported because Australia lacks sufficient processing capability, while plastics and polymers remain challenging and are the subject of ongoing research into recovery methods such as reuse or conversion into fuel via pyrolysis.[13] Dr Francis Norman emphasised that the industry is still developing effective ways to manage complex decommissioned materials designed for long-term durability.[14]

The Victorian Trades Hall Council highlighted that Victoria currently lacks dedicated onshore facilities to dismantle, process, recycle, and dispose of offshore infrastructure.[15] They argued that establishing a specialised decommissioning hub is essential to safely and efficiently manage this work within the state.[16] The Trades Hall Council also noted that existing recycling facilities are small-scale and not well located near suitable ports.[17]

FINDING 31: Victoria is geographically well positioned to support a domestic decommissioning industry but is constrained by limited dedicated port and processing infrastructure, as well as uneven domestic recycling capacity.

5.3 Decommissioning creates economic growth and employment opportunities for Victoria

The prevalence of recyclable materials created through decommissioning represents an opportunity for Victoria to develop its domestic recycling industry.[18] *Australia's Offshore Decommissioning Roadmap* notes that the development of a Victorian recycling industry offers economic and environmental benefits. For example:

- For every job that is created in landfill, there are three created in recycling, representing a significant opportunity for Victorian employment.[19]
- Recycling of materials such as steel represent significant environmental benefits when compared to other means of production.[20]

The roadmap says that Victoria has capability to meet recycling opportunities, being judged as having, 'good proximity to recycling and waste management facilities, including steel smelting'.[21] This includes recycled materials which present

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Victorian Trades Hall Council, *Submission 138,* pp. 3–4.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 Department of Industry, Science and Resources, *Australia's offshore resources decommissioning roadmap*, December 2024, p. 18.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

opportunities for domestic construction capability, such as 3,561 kilotons of ferrous material and 1,389 kilotons of concrete which are estimated to be made available via decommissioning.[22] The roadmap notes industry forecasts indicating a significant increase in demand for materials such as steel to support Australia's renewable energy transition and that decommissioned material could be a source for this demand.[23]

However, throughout the course of this Inquiry, the Committee heard that the extent of the opportunity to recycle decommissioned material will depend on Commonwealth Government decision-making on the extent of the removal of oil and gas infrastructure.[24] Evidence highlighted that the majority of recyclable and reusable materials, including steel, concrete and plastic is found in pipelines and subsea structures, which may be left in situ under legislation.[25]

Kevin Morrison, Energy Finance Analyst, Australian Gas at the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA), told the Committee that 'Victoria has a great opportunity' to create new jobs, emphasising that there are 'a lot of new job opportunities to be had in [the decommissioning] sector'.[26] The Committee heard that that Australia's decommissioning industry is estimated to be worth around $60 billion, with Victoria accounting for approximately $7 billion of this activity.[27]

Many stakeholders echoed CSIRO data, which indicated that around 3,500 jobs could be created nationally.[28] The Committee heard that Victoria would account for 'a reasonable proportion', with regional Victoria also benefiting.[29] The Victorian Trades Hall Council and Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) both estimated that Victoria could benefit from roughly 1,000 jobs given its share of offshore infrastructure.[30] Evidence outlined that the job creation could occur across a wide range of skill levels and supply chain roles.[31]

The MUA stated that decommissioning is a major opportunity to create long-term skilled jobs in Victoria's ports, coastal regions, and manufacturing sectors. These may be in fields such as marine operations, engineering, and environmental remediation.[32] It stressed that work should be kept onshore, publicly regulated, and union-supported

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22 Ibid.

23 Ibid, p. 19.

24 Stanley Woodhouse, Offshore Fossil Fuel Campaigner, Friends of the Earth Melbourne, public hearing, Melbourne, 10 December 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 20; Angie Moore, Policy Analyst, Oil and Gas Decommissioning, Maritime Union of Australia, Victoria Branch, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 3.

25 Dr Francis Norman, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 30.

26 Kevin Morrison, Energy Finance Analyst, Australian Gas, Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis, public hearing, Melbourne, 10 December 2025, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 43.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.; Danae Bosler, Assistant Secretary, Victorian Trades Hall Council, public hearing, Melbourne, 10 December 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 1; Angie Moore, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 3; Victorian Trades Hall Council, *Submission 138,* pp. 5–6; Maritime Union of Australia, *Submission 156*, p. 15.

29 Kevin Morrison, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 43; Victorian Trades Hall Council, *Submission 138,* pp. 5–6.

30 Victorian Trades Hall Council, *Submission 138,* pp. 5–6; Maritime Union of Australia, *Submission 156*, p. 15.

31 Kevin Morrison, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 43.

32 Maritime Union of Australia, *Submission 156*, p. 15.

to retain jobs and accountability in Australia rather than exporting them overseas.[33] The Union's submission stated that that each direct job could generate roughly two additional jobs across the supply chain and wider economy.[34]

CODA stated that decommissioning work mainly involves trade-level roles that are well suited to regional workforces, allowing people to work locally on significant projects in their own communities.[35] However, it noted that the industry is not a major employer overall, as both onshore dismantling and offshore vessel operations typically involve relatively small work crews compared with large-scale construction projects.[36]

ExxonMobil stated in its submission that decommissioning of its offshore oil and gas assets has expanded the workforce to over 800 offshore roles. They further project an additional 50–100 onshore jobs expected for dismantling and recycling at Barry Beach Marine Terminal, largely drawn from the Gippsland region.[37] ExxonMobil stated that it aims to maximise material recovery, targeting over 95% reuse or recycling of steel, with a focus on transporting materials to recycling facilities and prioritising local processing where possible.[38]

At a public hearing, ExxonMobil told the Committee that decommissioning activities are expected to create more than 700 jobs over a multi-year period for its decommissioning Campaign 1.[39] The Committee heard that over 1,000 jobs will continue to support ongoing Gippsland gas operations until those facilities are also decommissioned.[40]

FINDING 32: ExxonMobil's workforce for decommissioning Campaign 1 consists of approximately 800 offshore roles with an additional 50–100 onshore jobs expected for dismantling and recycling at Barry Beach Marine Terminal, to be drawn from the Gippsland region.

5.3.1 Development of a circular, recycling industry

Stakeholders argued that keeping scrap steel in Victoria for domestic processing delivers significantly greater economic and environmental benefits than exporting

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 Centre of Decommissioning Australia, *Submission 34*, pp. 8–9.

36 Ibid.

37 ExxonMobil Australia, *Submission 137*, p. 2.

38 Ibid.

39 Richard Perry, Major Projects Manager, Australia, ExxonMobil, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 45.

40 Ibid.

it.[41] Evidence suggested that processing 10,000 tonnes locally could support about 37.2 full-time jobs and generate $4.8 million in value-added economic activity, compared with $1.3 million if exported unprocessed.[42] The Committee heard there was an opportunity to recycle an estimated 3.5 million tonnes of steel to support Australia's emerging green steel industry and reduce emissions through lower-emission carbon steel production processes.[43]

The Australian Steel Institute argued that scrap steel from Bass Strait decommissioning is a significant and finite national resource that should be retained and processed domestically rather than exported.[44] Evidence noted that with large volumes of high-grade steel expected from retiring offshore infrastructure, there is a major opportunity to supply Australia's steel industry, support green steel production, reduce emissions, and strengthen circular economy outcomes.[45] The Australian Steel Institute advocated for policies that recognise decommissioned steel as a valuable national resource rather than waste and called for a moratorium on unprocessed scrap exports to ensure local manufacturers have sufficient feedstock.[46]

The Victorian Trades Hall Council suggested that decommissioning 'is as an opportunity to build a circular economy', particularly by recovering steel for domestic green steel production.[47] They noted that recycled steel can significantly reduce emissions by up to around 1.5 tonnes of CO_2 per tonne compared with virgin steel production.[48] However, they stressed that metal from decommissioned oil and gas infrastructure, which may have been exposed to contaminants must be adequately processed to ensure that materials are free from hazardous substances.[49]

There was also support for the establishment of a decommissioning hub. The Victorian Trades Hall Council noted that 'Victoria can establish an integrated hub linking marine logistics, recycling, and green metal industries' if it integrates onshore decommissioning facilities 'with a final recycling endpoint in Melbourne'.[50] They recommended that the Victorian Government establish an onshore decommissioning hub where offshore structures can be dismantled and processed before recycling.

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41 Dr Francis Norman, *Transcript of* evidence, p. 33; Dr Kylie Walker, *Transcript of* evidence, pp. 44–45; Jerusha Beresford, Sustainability Adviser, Australian Steel Institute, public hearing, Melbourne, 10 December 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 52; Anda Banikos, *Transcript of* evidence, p. 30; Angie Moore, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 3; Claire Johnson, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2; Lauri Widdup, *Submission 58*, p. 1; Russel Baader, *Submission 60,* p. 1; Liane Gibson, *Submission 67*, p. 2; Myra De Smet, *Submission 76*, p. 2; Australian Steel Institute, *Submission 145*, pp. 2–3.

42 Jerusha Beresford, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 52.

43 Kevin Morrison, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 43.

44 Jerusha Beresford, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 52.

45 Fern Cadman, *Transcript of* evidence, p. 20; Kevin Morrison*, Transcript of evidence*, p. 44, 47; Jerusha Beresford, *Transcript of* evidence, p. 52; Danae Bosler, *Transcript of* evidence, p. 1; Angie Moore, *Transcript of* evidence, p. 2, 3; Erin Sleeth, *Submission 127*, p. 1; Victorian Trades Hall Council, *Submission 138*, p. 2; Australian Steel Institute, *Submission 145*, pp. 2–3; The Wilderness Society, *Submission 148*, pp. 9–10; Greenpeace, *Submission 159*, p. 6.

46 Angie Moore, Policy Analyst, Oil and Gas Decommissioning, Maritime Union of Australia, Victoria Branch, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 4; Anda Banikos, public hearing, Leongatha, 11 February 2026, *Transcript of* evidence, p. 30.

47 Victorian Trades Hall Council, *Submission 138,* p. 5.

48 Victorian Trades Hall Council, *Submission 138,* p. 4; Australian Steel Institute, *Submission 145*, p. 3.

49 Victorian Trades Hall Council, *Submission 138,* p. 4.

50 Ibid.

Further, they suggested that disposal facilities could be included at the hub to efficiently manage non-recyclable materials.[51]

Both the Victorian Trades Hall Council and MUA suggested that Victoria's decommissioning approach could be strengthened by aligning decommissioning regulation with the *Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021* (Vic). Evidence indicated that this would ensure recovered offshore materials 'are processed, recycled, and documented within Victoria', supporting both environmental protection and the state's waste reduction and circular economy targets.[52]

The Victorian Trades Hall Council explained that including decommissioned oil and gas infrastructure in the Act would:

- require recovery and recycling of decommissioned materials,
- fund processing and monitoring through operator levies
- mandate public reporting on recovered materials and emissions reductions.[53]

The Council argued that this approach would embed cost recovery into the circular economy framework, protecting taxpayers from clean-up costs while supporting Victoria's net-zero and recycling goals.[54]

Vice-President of Decommissioning for Woodside, Andrew Lobb noted that the CODA are developing a map of Australia's decommissioning waste and facilities networks and recommended that ongoing development of this 'would give both regulators and operators a shared reference point'.[55]

FINDING 33: A domestic circular, recycling industry resulting from the processing of offshore decommissioning materials would deliver significant higher economic value, employment creation, and emissions reductions.

FINDING 34: Retaining and processing offshore decommissioned scrap steel domestically delivers substantially greater economic, employment, and environmental benefits than exporting it.

FINDING 35: Materials from decommissioned oil and gas infrastructure are not explicitly covered under the *Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021* (Vic).

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51 Ibid., pp. 3–4.

52 Maritime Union of Australia, *Submission 156*, p. 11.

53 Victorian Trades Hall Council, *Submission 138,* p. 5.

54 Ibid.

55 Andrew Lobb, Vice-President, Decommissioning, Woodside Energy, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 59.

RECOMMENDATION 16: That the Victorian Government prioritise domestic processing of decommissioned offshore steel and ensure, where capacity and capabilities allow, that it is not exported overseas.

RECOMMENDATION 17: That the Victorian Government amend the *Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021* (Vic) to include industrial-scale decommissioning of oil and gas infrastructure.

RECOMMENDATION 18: That the Victorian Government establish a dedicated onshore decommissioning hub to consolidate dismantling, processing, recycling, and disposal activities for offshore infrastructure and support the creation of domestic jobs in recycling.

5.3.2 Supporting Traditional Owner identified employment opportunities

The Committee received evidence from a broad range of stakeholders who expressed support for Traditional Owner identified employment opportunities.[56]

Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC) stated in its submission that 'offshore oil and gas operations have historically impacted Gunaikurnai lands and seas without delivering economic or other tangible benefits to Gunaikurnai'.[57]

GLaWAC called for the replacement of ad hoc compensation with binding, co-designed agreements that ensure long-term economic, environmental, and governance commitments for the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation.[58] GLaWAC stated that these agreements would include preferential procurement for Gunaikurnai businesses, ongoing funding for governance and cultural heritage responsibilities, economic benefit-sharing for stewardship and monitoring activities, and enforceable accountability mechanisms to ensure industry remains responsible for long-term environmental and cultural outcomes.[59]

CODA stated that decommissioning employment should include opportunities for Traditional Owner personnel. This is because much of Australia's oil and gas

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56 Jason Medd, *Transcript of* evidence, p. 11; Cr Nathan Hersey, Mayor, South Gippsland Shire Council, public hearing, Leongatha, 11 February 2026, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 20; Carly Dober, *Submission 33*, p. 6; Centre of Decommissioning Australia, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 10; Lauri Widdup, *Submission 58*, p. 2; Liane Gibson, *Submission 67*, p. 2; Tim Brown, *Submission 91*, p. 2; Regina Bos, *Submission 99*, p. 2; Friends of the Earth Melbourne, *Submission 105*, p. 5; Meridith Rose, *Submission 117*, p. 1; Erin Sleeth, *Submission 127*, p. 1; ExxonMobil Australia, Submission 137, p. 2; Victorian Trades Hall Council, Submission 138, pp. 5–7; Andrew McGlashan, *Submission 142*, pp. 1–2; South Gippsland Shire Council, *Submission 143*, p. 1; Doctors for the Environment, *Submission 155*, pp. 8–9; Maritime Union of Australia, *Submission 156*, pp. 16–18; Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation, Submission 164, p. 1.

57 Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation, *Submission 164*, p. 1.

58 Ibid, pp. 2–3.

59 Ibid.

infrastructure is located in remote areas with small communities, whose local residents are well placed to participate in the workforce.[60]

The MUA stated that Traditional Owners should play a central role in Victoria's decommissioning and offshore energy sectors, combining cultural knowledge with environmental and economic benefits.[61] It identified employment opportunities for participation in marine monitoring, cultural heritage management, enterprise development, and workforce training, supported through partnerships with government, industry, and TAFE.[62]

The Union called for sustained funding to support training, planning participation, and environmental projects, alongside stronger co-governance arrangements.[63] The submission stated the Victorian Treaty framework represents a key mechanism to formalise Traditional Owner rights and enable co-regulation, economic participation, and long-term capacity building in Sea Country management.[64]

FINDING 36: Traditional Owner employment opportunities in decommissioning projects require formal agreements and co-governance arrangements to recognise cultural, environmental, and economic rights.

RECOMMENDATION 19: That the Victorian Government establish binding, co-designed agreements with Traditional Owners, supported through the Victorian Treaty framework, to formalise economic participation, co-governance, and long-term benefit-sharing in decommissioning and offshore energy projects.

5.4 Workforce: using local skills and knowledge in decommissioning

5.4.1 Supporting a local decommissioning workforce

Australia's Offshore Resources Decommissioning Roadmap identifies a key priority in supporting a skilled workforce in the decommissioning process. This includes working with unions, industry and state governments to ensure a skilled workforce is developed to support decommissioning.[65] For Victoria, this provides opportunity both in supporting its significant existing offshore workforce, and the development of its future offshore wind workforce. The roadmap identifies significant similarities between

60 Centre of Decommissioning Australia, *Submission 34*, p. 10.

61 Maritime Union of Australia, *Submission 156*, pp. 16–17.

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

65 Department of Industry, Science and Resources, *Australia's offshore resources decommissioning roadmap*, December 2024, p. 4.

the oil and gas decommissioning and offshore wind industries. In particular, it notes the overlap in workforce skills and training between the industries, with 60% of skills and job roles in decommissioning having high or good overlap with offshore wind construction.[66]

The Assistant Secretary of the Victorian branch of the MUA, Aarin Moon gave evidence to the Committee that:

> there are a number of Victorian seafarers who built and constructed the offshore oil and gas infrastructure in the Bass Strait. Since then we have serviced it, and now we have the skills readily available to remove it and bring it ashore and recycle it here in Victoria, creating further opportunity for jobs in the state.[67]

The Victorian Trades Hall Council stated that a Victorian decommissioning industry 'could create thousands of highly skilled jobs in engineering, logistics, environmental monitoring and recycling' and serve as a major source of regional employment.[68] The Council's submission indicated that offshore oil and gas workers are well suited to transition into decommissioning roles due to their existing skills and could help train new workers.[69]

They recommended that the Victorian Government invest in targeted workforce training to maximise the economic and employment benefits of decommissioning.[70] The Trades Hall Council also called for funding for TAFE-based training and licensing for high-risk roles as well the development of bridging programs to help offshore oil and gas workers transition into decommissioning and offshore wind jobs.[71] The Council reinforced that initiatives to increase participation of women and First Nations people in the industry are also critical.[72]

As noted in Chapter 4, South Gippsland Shire Council highlighted their endorsement of the *Renewable Energy Impact and Readiness Study* together with Latrobe City Council and Regional Development Australia. The Study noted the importance of 'workforce transition and skills continuity' to align 'decommissioning activity with future industries, such as offshore wind, to retain skilled workforce locally and to reduce reliance on fly-in, fly-out labour'.[73]

South Gippsland Shire Council noted that Barry Beach Marine Terminal and nearby Port Anthony are expected to host 'operations and maintenance bases for the planned Bass Strait offshore wind farms … for at least 30 years'.[74] The Council said

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66 Ibid.

67 Aarin Moon, Assistant Secretary, Maritime Union of Australia, Victoria Branch, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 1.

68 Victorian Trades Hall Council, *Submission 138,* pp. 5–6.

69 Ibid.

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid.

73 Cr Nathan Hersey, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 20.

74 South Gippsland Shire Council, *Submission 143,* p. 1.

that the region is likely to see significant direct and indirect job growth, supporting the transition to renewable energy operations and improving the ports' long-term sustainability.[75]

Cr Nathan Hersey stated that ports such as Barry Beach Marine Terminal and Port Anthony should be viewed as long-term strategic assets rather than end-of-life infrastructure.[76] The Committee heard that the Council is well positioned to support Victoria's offshore wind industry over coming decades and could also evolve into broader regional logistics hubs connecting energy, agriculture, food production, and other industries.[77]

The MUA submission noted the overlap between decommissioning and offshore wind industries.[78] They highlighted that offshore decommissioning and offshore wind development will rely on the same port and industrial infrastructure and workforce.[79] The Union argued that Ports Victoria should 'adopt an integrated strategy' so both sectors can be supported together rather than compete for resources.[80] They also believed that Victoria's southern coast is well placed to serve as a shared hub for offshore wind construction, maintenance, and decommissioning activities, with coordinated planning through Ports Victoria and the Port of Hastings Corporation.[81]

At a public hearing, Angie Moore, Policy Officer at the Maritime Union of Australia, Victoria Branch, noted that the magnitude of overlap between the decommissioning industry and the offshore wind power industry 'is huge'.[82] The Committee heard that concurrent industry activity could create competition for limited resources, demonstrating the need for coordination.[83] Angie Moore recommended stronger whole-of-government coordination, potentially through a dedicated taskforce. This would align skills and resource management across different government portfolios and ensure decommissioning and offshore wind development are delivered efficiently.[84]

Further, the MUA in their submission argued that:

> all Victorian decommissioning and offshore wind ports should be managed as public, common-user facilities under the Ports Victoria framework, not privately controlled by a single company. This is essential to avoid monopoly pricing, ensure consistent safety and labour standards, and deliver value to all projects.[85]

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75 Ibid.

76 Cr Nathan Hersey, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 21.

77 Ibid.

78 Maritime Union of Australia, *Submission 156,* p. 15.

79 Ibid.; Angie Moore, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 7.

80 Maritime Union of Australia, *Submission 156,* p. 15.

81 Ibid.

82 Angie Moore, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 7.

83 Ibid.

84 Ibid.

85 Maritime Union of Australia, *Submission 156,* p. 15.

FINDING 37: There is strong workforce and skills overlap between offshore decommissioning and offshore wind development, which present a significant opportunity for workforce transition, regional job creation, and long-term industrial continuity across Victoria's ports and coastal regions if industries are coordinated effectively.

FINDING 38: Without coordinated planning, the concurrent development of decommissioning oil and gas infrastructure and offshore wind projects risk competition for shared infrastructure, labour, and resources.

RECOMMENDATION 20: That the Victorian Government implement integrated workforce planning, including TAFE-based training, bridging programs, and targeted initiatives to support the transition of oil and gas workers into the decommissioning and offshore wind industries.

RECOMMENDATION 21: That the Victorian Government establish a coordinated, whole-of-government or cross-agency mechanism to align infrastructure use, labour supply, and project scheduling across the decommissioning and offshore wind sectors.

5.4.2 Local communities should benefit from industry transitions occurring in their area

The Committee heard that local communities, which have relied on the oil and gas industry for employment, should be prioritised as the industry undertakes decommissioning works and Victoria's energy sector transitions.[86]

As previously noted in Chapter 4, the impact of onshore decommissioning will be felt most directly in South Gippsland due to Barry Beach Marine Terminal serving as the 'primary onshore location for decommissioning activity'.[87] Mayor of South Gippsland Shire Council, Cr Nathan Hersey stated that Barry Beach Marine Terminal 'has operated for almost 60 years' in South Gippsland with the terminal playing 'a central part in the construction, servicing and operation of Bass Strait oil and gas infrastructure over that time'.[88] The Mayor emphasised South Gippsland's 'longstanding and strategic role in Victoria's energy sector', noting that this area sits at 'the intersection of legacy fossil fuel infrastructure and Victoria's broader energy transition'.[89]

Cr Nathan Hersey said that decommissioning presents a significant employment and economic opportunity for South Gippsland, supporting job creation and the

86 Cr Nathan Hersey, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 20.

87 Ibid.

88 Ibid.

89 Ibid.

transition of ports such as Barry Beach and Port Anthony into renewable energy hubs, including servicing planned Bass Strait offshore wind projects.[90] Evidence indicated that decommissioning projects could deliver employment opportunities and infrastructure upgrades, but local communities need to be integrated into ExxonMobil's decision-making to ensure South Gippsland benefits.[91] Evidence expressed that jobs could increase economic activity across the Council, providing support to services such as 'supermarkets, service stations and hotels'.[92] Cr John Schelling believed that towns such as Toora, Welshpool and Yarram could benefit from jobs at Barry Beach Marine Terminal, indicating that this opportunity would give these towns 'the ability … to improve and survive'.[93]

Cr Nathan Hersey stated that decommissioning projects could increase population and investment in the region, potentially benefiting local tourism.[94] He acknowledged concerns about environmental impacts but argued that companies are unlikely to harm natural assets given modern scrutiny and social licence expectations.[95]

Cr Christian Stefani suggested that development associated with decommissioning could deliver indirect benefits by funding public and civic infrastructure, which in turn would attract further balanced investment and regional growth.[96] Cr Christian Stefani noted that Councils endorsed *Renewable Energy Impact and Readiness Study*, emphasising that this study has enabled council to identify opportunities and seek collaboration with government.[97]

RECOMMENDATION 22: That the Victorian Government collaborate with local government to prioritise community participation in decision-making so regional communities directly benefit from decommissioning activity, including through employment and economic development opportunities.

RECOMMENDATION 23: That the Victorian Government and industry collaborate on coordinated regional planning and investment to support long-term economic diversification and ensure workforce and employment continuity in regional areas.

RECOMMENDATION 24: That the Victorian Government develop an industry plan to capitalise on the jobs and economic growth opportunities arising from oil and gas decommissioning and its intersection with existing, emerging and transitioning industries.

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90 Ibid, p. 21.

91 Ibid, p. 24.

92 Cr John Schelling, South Gippsland Shire Council, public hearing, Leongatha, 11 February 2026, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 23.

93 Ibid.

94 Cr Nathan Hersey, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 25.

95 Ibid.

96 Christian Stefani, Manager, Regional Partnerships, South Gippsland Shire Council, public hearing, Melbourne, 11 February 2026, *Transcript of evidence,* p. 27.

97 Ibid.

Adopted by the Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee
Parliament of Victoria, East Melbourne
Wednesday 27 May 2026

Appendix A
About the Inquiry

A.1 Submissions

No.	Author
1	John Wakely
2	Mike Bailey
3	Maureen Callaghan
4	Name withheld
5	Brad Roussos
6	Travis Wood
7	Name withheld
8	Paul Walsh
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10	Judy O'Donnell
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14	Mal Alexander
15	Marion Wheatland
16	Name withheld
17	Creighton Dickie
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19	Michael Palmer
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21	Joel Grist
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26	Christine Rendell
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29	Lakes Entrance Fishermen's Limited

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38	Ken Wilson
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43	Ron Hurst
44	Name withheld
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46	Tom Knowles
47	Brett Koplin
48	Infrastructure Victoria
49	Claire Johnson
50	Anda Banikos
51	Bruce Munro
52	Name withheld
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55	Lighter Footprints
56	Ngaire Bissett
57	Name withheld

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60	Russell Baader
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67	Liane Gibson
68	Jason Alexander
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70	Richard Whitfield
71	Phillip Talihmanidis
72	Shaun Knott
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76	Dr Myra De Smet
77	Bruce Mowson
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79	Robert Monk
80	Odi Evans
81	Nola Kelly
82	Ian Russell
83	Name withheld
84	David Myer
85	Josh Wyndham-Kidd
86	Rajiv - Max Roy
87	Name withheld
88	Michelle Connolly
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90	Robyn Prior
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93	Judge Astrid

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97	Name withheld
98	Name withheld
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100	John Iser
101	John Pharoah
102	Energy Safe Victoria
103	Jean Christie
104	Name withheld
105	Friends of the Earth Melbourne
106	Name withheld
107	Janet Souter
108	Phyllis Di Palma
109	Marnie Brooks
110	Kemran Mestan
111	Anthony Morris
112	CLIMARTE
113	Name withheld
114	Julianne Stuart
115	Manon Van Kouswijik
116	Susan Moodie
117	Meredith Rose
118	Environment Victoria
119	Maxine Andrews
120	Dale Stohr
121	Robert Briggs
122	Bernard
123	Michelle Rowney
124	Lois O'Connor
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130	Candice Stothers
131	David Punshon
132	Frances Wood
133	Zavier Evans
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138	Victorian Trades Hall Council
139	Name withheld
140	Australian Energy Producers
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142	Andrew McGlashan
143	South Gippsland Shire Council
144	Danielle Berto
145	Australian Steel Institute
146	Mark Olsen
147	Nichola Handley

No.	Author
148	The Wilderness Society
149	Gary Saunders
150	Jack Hannan
151	Robert Ormiston-Smith
152	Jane Oram
153	Penelope Adams
154	Carol Drew
155	Doctors for the Environment Australia
156	Maritime Union of Australia
157	Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions
158	Joshua Jennings
159	Greenpeace Australia Pacific
160	Surfrider Foundation Surf Coast Branch
161	Committee for Gippsland
162	Fire Rescue Victoria
163	Devon Worboys
164	Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC)

A.2 Public hearings

6 March 2026

Committee Hearing Room 2, 55 St Andrews Place, East Melbourne, VIC

Witness	Position and Organisation
Aarin Moon	Assistant Secretary, Maritime Union of Australia, Victoria Branch
Angie Moore	Policy Analyst, Oil and Gas Decommissioning, Maritime Union of Australia, Victoria Branch
Danae Bosler	Assistant Secretary, Victorian Trades Hall Council
Dr Tom Cresswell	Researcher, Ecotoxicology and Radioecology, Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation
Dan Hunt	Director Regional Victoria, Operations Division, Environment Protection Authority Victoria
Sam Jenkin	Chief Health and Safety Officer, WorkSafe
Halil Ahmet	Principal Occupational Hygienist, WorkSafe Victoria
Don Hough	Principal, Energy Infrastructure Regulation, Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action

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Witness	Position and Organisation
Linda Bibby	Acting Executive Director, Policy and Programs, Resources Victoria, Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action
Sandra O'Farrell	Manager, Petroleum Authorisations, Resources Victoria, Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action
Richard Perry	Major Projects Manager, ExxonMobil Australia
Andrew Lobb	Vice President Decommissioning, Woodside
Philippa Milne	Environmental Lead for Projects Australia, Woodside
Sue McCarrey	Chief Executive Officer, National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority
Graham Blair	Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Regulatory Operations,, National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority
David Christensen	Executive Director, Development and Decommissioning, , National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority

11 February 2026

Main Hall, Leongatha Memorial Hall, 6–8 McCartin Street, Leongatha, VIC

Witness	Position and Organisation
John Godfrey	Facilitator, Victorian Energy Future Network
Chris Waites	Chief Executive Officer, Gippsland Ports
Cr Nathan Hersey	Mayor, South Gippsland Shire Council
Cr John Schelling	Councillor, South Gippsland Shire Council
Christian Stefani	Manager, Regional Partnerships, South Gippsland Shire Council
Nola Kelly	–
Anda Banikos	–
Zavier Evans	–
Simon Boag	Executive Officer, South East Trawl Fishing Industry Association

10 December 2025

Federation Room, Parliament House, Spring Street, East Melbourne, VIC

Witness	Position and Organisation
Professor Tina Soliman-Hunter	Energy and Resources Law, Macquarie Law School, Macquarie University
Peter Kos	Director, Victoria and New South Wales, Australian Energy Producers
Jason Medd	Director, Offshore and Decommissioning, Australian Energy Producers
Fern Cadman	Fossil Fuel Industry Campaigner, The Wilderness Society
Stanley Woodhouse	Offshore Fossil Fuel Campaigner, Friends of the Earth Melbourne
Dr Francis Norman	Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director, Centre of Decommissioning Australia

Witness	Position and Organisation
Dr Kylie Walker	Chief Executive Officer, Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering
Professor Robert Melchers	Fellow, Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering
Kevin Morrison	Energy Finance Analyst, Australian Gas, Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis
Jerusha Beresford	Sustainability Advisor, Australian Steel Institute

Extract of proceedings

Legislative Council Standing Order 23.20(5) requires the Committee to include in its report all divisions on a question relating to the adoption of the draft report. All Members have a deliberative vote. In the event of an equality of votes, the Chair also has a casting vote.

The Committee divided on the following questions during consideration of this report. Questions agreed to without division are not recorded in these extracts.

Committee meeting – 27 March 2026

Dr Mansfield moved that, in Chapter 1, the following text be deleted:

> However, it does not feel it is able to meaningfully address such a significant policy area in this inquiry alone and has chosen not to make findings and recommendations in this regard.

And that the following text be added:

> While it was not the main focus of this inquiry, the Committee believes it is an area that requires further examination.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 5	**Noes 3**
Ryan Batchelor	Melina Bath
David Ettershank	Gaelle Broad
Dr Sarah Mansfield	Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell
Tom McIntosh	
Sheena Watt	

Question agreed to.

Dr Mansfield moved that, in Chapter 1, the following text be deleted:

> The Committee was provided with information regarding the larger transition from the use of gas for Victoria's homes and businesses by Infrastructure Victoria, the Energy Futures Network and others. While it was not the main focus of this inquiry, the Committee believes it is an area that requires further examination.

And that the following text be added:

> The Committee notes that several submissions and witnesses, including Infrastructure Victoria, the Energy Futures Network, discussed the transition away from gas to renewables and the implications for the broader gas network. As this was outside of the

terms of reference, the Committee did not explore this issue in depth. This may be an area for future inquiry.

Ms Lovell moved, as an amendment, That the words 'This may be an area for future inquiry.' be omitted.

The question, that the amendment moved by Wendy Lovell be agreed to was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 4	Noes 5
Melina Bath	Ryan Batchelor
Gaelle Broad	David Ettershank
Wendy Lovell	Dr Sarah Mansfield
Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell	Tom McIntosh
	Sheena Watt

Question negatived.

The original question was put. **The Committee agreed on the voices.**

Ms Bath moved that the following Finding be deleted:

That the Victorian Government embed Traditional Owner leadership, knowledge and authority within Victorian governance and regulatory frameworks including Victoria's Treaty process, to support self-determination and long-term cultural and environmental stewardship of Sea Country.

And that the following Finding be added:

That the Victorian Government recognise Traditional Owner knowledge, leadership and involvement within governance and regulatory frameworks for offshore decommissioning, to support cultural values and the long-term protection and stewardship of Sea Country.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 4	Noes 5
Melina Bath	Ryan Batchelor
Gaelle Broad	David Ettershank
Wendy Lovell	Dr Sarah Mansfield
Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell	Tom McIntosh
	Sheena Watt

Question negatived.

Ms Bath moved that the following Finding be deleted:

> That the Victorian Government establish binding, co-designed agreements with Traditional Owners, supported through the Victorian Treaty framework, to formalise economic participation, co-governance, and long-term benefit-sharing in decommissioning and offshore energy projects.

And that the following Finding be added:

> That the Victorian Government work in partnership with Traditional Owners to develop co-designed agreements that support economic participation, input into decision-making and long-term benefit-sharing in decommissioning and offshore energy projects.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 4	Noes 5
Melina Bath	Ryan Batchelor
Gaelle Broad	David Ettershank
Wendy Lovell	Dr Sarah Mansfield
Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell	Tom McIntosh
	Sheena Watt

Question negatived.

Minority report

VICTORIAN PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO DECOMMISSIONING OIL AND GAS INFRASTRUCTURE

LIBERAL AND NATIONAL'S MINORITY REPORT

June 2026

The Liberal and Nationals MPs acknowledge that the report provides a useful overview of the oil and gas decommissioning landscape, identifying key regulatory, environmental and economic considerations, highlighting the opportunities and challenges associated with hosting decommissioning activities.

Protecting Choice and Energy Security for Victorians

Victoria is a gas state, and Victorians should have a choice to keep it that way. More than two million Victorians use gas in their homes and businesses, around 80 per cent of homes are connected to gas. AEMO has projected gas shortfalls in Victoria to occur as early as 2026, with major supply shortages starting in 2028 and continuing to increase to 2035. New gas exploration needs to occur now if these shortfalls are going to be mitigated.
Labor's Gas Substitution Roadmap is a war on gas. It seeks to force families, renters, small businesses and industry away from the appliances and energy sources that work for them, whether for cooking, hot water, heating or commercial use. Labor's gas ban will cost many families tens of thousands of dollars as the ban will prevent the replacement of existing gas appliances.

Victorian households should be allowed to choose how they cook, heat and produce hot water, they should not be directed by the Allan Labor Government.
New gas exploration would reinvigorate local gas production, grow Victoria's economy and protect from a gas shortfall. Gas has an important role to play in the future as a transitional energy source as the domestic and global economy decarbonises and will remain a key component of the energy mix.

The Liberal and Nationals Oppose Recommendations 15 & 19

The Liberal and Nationals MPs maintain a consistent position in opposing the Statewide Treaty framework, while proposing practical alternative recommendations. Our amendments while rejected by five of the nine members, sought to preserve recognition of and partnership with Traditional Owners in a clear and workable way.

Melina Bath
Member for Eastern Victoria

Hon Wendy Lovell
Member for Northern Victoria Region

Gaelle Broad
Member for Northern Victoria Region