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Cover up: Santos gas export hub in Darwin has been leaking methane for nearly 20 years

Environment groups are calling on the Albanese Government to step in, as documents reveal Santos' major gas export hub in Darwin has been leaking huge amounts of methane for nearly 20 years.

Explosive documents obtained by the Environment Centre NT reveal Santos's Darwin LNG facility has been leaking methane since 2006, sparking allegations of a gas industry cover up and systemic regulatory failure.

Darwin LNG is strategically important to Australia's position as one of the world's largest LNG exporters and is set to be backfilled with gas from Santos controversial [Barossa project](#) in late 2025.

Drone monitoring conducted during 2019-2020 due diligence for the sale of Darwin LNG assets from ConocoPhillips to Santos estimated the leak at up to 184kg per hour.

Santos and ConocoPhillips allegedly concealed the leak from the public to prevent it derailing approval for the controversial Barossa project. Despite currently being shut down for works in preparation for backfill with Barossa gas, Santos has not fixed the leak.

Multiple government agencies knew about the leak but failed to require Santos to fix it, including the NT Environment Protection Agency (NTEPA), NT Worksafe, Clean Energy Regulator, National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority (NOPSEMA), and CSIRO. This raises serious questions about transparency and regulatory capture.

Santos, valued at an estimated \$36 billion and posting [\\$1.2 billion profit](#) after tax last year, appears set to let this massive methane leak continue for another 25 years unless the Albanese Government intervenes.

The Darwin LNG licence is due for renewal by the NTEPA on [18 September 2025](#).

A consortium led by the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) is currently conducting due diligence in relation to a takeover bid for Santos. The end date for due diligence is 19 September 2025.

Environment groups are calling for:

1. **Santos to fix the leak.** The faulty tank poses a major threat to the safety of the Darwin community and Australia's climate. Without action, this massive methane leak will continue for another 25 years, while the gas company operating it would pay nothing for the massive emissions it caused.
2. **The Albanese Government to step in and fix the problem. It must:**
 - o Investigate the systemic failures of the Clean Energy Regulator, NOPSEMA and CSIRO to address this problem

- Change the law to require the highest standard of leak measurement, reporting and repair to ensure big gas companies reveal and pay for their emissions.
- 3. **The NTEPA** to make fixing the leak a condition of [renewing the licence for Darwin LNG](#). It should also investigate prosecuting Santos for pollution offences.

[Images, drone footage and documents available here.](#)

Kirsty Howey, Executive Director, Environment Centre NT said:

“This is a national scandal and an unfolding disaster. Santos has been caught red-handed putting the environment, climate and the health and safety of the people of Darwin at risk, while regulators have been asleep at the wheel.”

“A raft of government agencies meant to protect our climate, health, and the environment have acted in Santos’ interests instead.”

“Santos must fix the leak, and the Albanese Government must fix the problem. The faulty tank threatens Australia’s climate and the health and safety of the people of Darwin.”

“This is Santos’ skeleton in the closet, and the community should rightly be asking what else they are hiding.”

Mark Ogge, Principal Adviser at The Australia Institute said:

“The revelation that all the key Australian and NT government regulators, and the CSIRO knew about a major 20-year methane leak and failed to act or inform the public is shocking. This reeks of the gas industry capture of Australia’s regulators.”

“The NT EPA, NOPSEMA, CSIRO, and NTWorksafe are meant to protect our health, safety and environment from the activities of gas corporations, not cover-up for them.”

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