




# RISKY BUSINESS:

**Woodside's Burrup Hub  
is a disaster in the making**



An aerial photograph of a coastline. At the top, there is a wide, light-colored sandy beach. Below the beach, the ocean water is a vibrant turquoise color, showing a dense pattern of dark, vertical ridges or channels, possibly coral reefs or seabed topography. The water transitions to a deeper blue further out.

(Cover Image) Woodside  
Energy's North West Shelf  
gas project on the Burrup  
Peninsula © Greenpeace

Landscape and Marine Life  
off Western Australia from  
above © Alex Westover

## **Acknowledgements**

Greenpeace Australia Pacific Limited acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and the Indigenous peoples of the Pacific Islands, and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters, and culture. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present.



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Woodside's Burrup Hub gas project is the nation's biggest fossil fuel threat. If approved, it will jeopardise 54 vulnerable species, spew out 6.1 billion tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> and generate 13 times Australia's annual emissions. **Our Environment Minister has the power to stop this dangerous project from going ahead and define Labor's legacy on nature.**

Woodside dredging  
in endangered sea  
turtle habitat near the  
Dampier Archipelago  
© Alex Westover

# SUMMARY

## SHUT DOWN THE BURRUP HUB

Woodside's Burrup Hub is Australia's largest proposed fossil fuel project, posing an unparalleled threat to our oceans, wildlife, and climate. Woodside, an oil and gas company renowned for its flimsy environmental and safety record, plans to extract gas from six fields off the coast of Western Australia. **The project would involve a 900km pipeline through protected environmental areas, and extend the life of existing gas plants until 2070, undermining our clean energy targets.**

### A disaster in the making

**Carbon costs** Greenpeace's analysis has revealed that Woodside's Burrup Hub is Australia's biggest climate threat, with the project belching out 6.1 billion tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions over its proposed 50-year lifetime.<sup>1</sup> The scale of this is off the charts —lifetime emissions from the Burrup Hub would amount to more than 13 times Australia's annual emissions from all sources, and more than 73 times New Zealand's annual emissions.<sup>2</sup> The increase in greenhouse gases will worsen global heating, intensifying extreme weather events and rising sea levels. At a time when the International Energy Agency and the United Nations have called for developed countries to rapidly phase out fossil fuels to keep the world within 1.5 degrees of warming, the Burrup Hub is incompatible with Australia's commitment to climate action.

**Nature hazards** Drilling for up to 50 gas wells is planned just over 2km from pristine ecosystems such as Scott Reef, home to endangered species like the green sea turtle and pygmy blue whale. Heavy shipping and drilling activities jeopardise whale migration pathways, while gas flaring and lights disrupt turtle nesting. Subsidence is another major concern – where gas extracted from reservoirs causes the seafloor to sink and threatens Sandy Islet, a critical nesting site for sea turtles that

Woodside's Burrup  
North-west Shelf Plant  
in Western Australia  
© Luke Sweet /  
Conservation Council  
Western Australia

1. Greenpeace Australia Pacific. [New Emissions Data Exposes Shocking Scale Of Woodside's Burrup Hub Gas Project.](#)  
2. Australian conservation foundation. (2024, March 21) [Woodside's Burrup Hub a climate bomb in the making.](#)



could face ocean inundation. A disaster, such as an oil spill at a project site, could devastate marine ecosystems and coastlines as far as East Timor and Indonesia, causing lasting environmental damage. This comes after the WA Environmental Protection Authority effectively deemed Browse too risky to proceed.<sup>3</sup> In August 2024, a preliminary view from the environmental regulator suggested the proposal was “unacceptable” on nature grounds.

**Safety risks** Woodside has a worrying history of neglect, as the company is responsible for at least six major incidents in the last decade, including an explosion, an oil spill, and a whale calf collision. Woodside repeatedly fails to clean up its waste, leaving massive pieces of rusted, toxic infrastructure to rot in the ocean.

3. The Guardian. (2024, August 6) [Western Australia's EPA has made a big call on a major gas expansion.](#)



Woodside's toxic, discarded oil tower near Ningaloo Reef and Exmouth Gulf, Western Australia © Greenpeace

# WHAT IS WOODSIDE'S GAS MEGA PROJECT?

Woodside's Burrup Hub is Australia's dirtiest and most polluting fossil fuel proposal, dwarfing all similar projects in scale, environmental risk, and carbon costs. If approved, it will become the largest new fossil fuel project in the Southern Hemisphere.<sup>4</sup>

**The Burrup Hub project comprises a plan to drill the Scarborough and Browse gas field and extend the life of a huge gas plant called the North West Shelf LNG Plant, which processes gas for export. In essence, this will add two new gas fields to WA's pristine coastline, exploiting reserves from six untapped fields and drilling up to 80 offshore wells.** It's no surprise this project poses a major threat to wildlife and the World Heritage-listed Ningaloo Coast. Drilling is planned just 2km from ecologically sensitive areas, such as Scott Reef, which is home to endangered species such as the green sea turtle and pygmy blue whale. An incident at Browse could also pollute the waters of Argo-Rowley Terrace Marine Park, Mermaid Reef Marine Park, and Rowley Shoals Marine Park. At Scarborough, an accident could pollute Dampier Marine Park, Montebello Marine Park, Gascoyne Marine Park, and Carnarvon Canyon Marine Park.

Both Browse and Scarborough will feed into the controversial North West Shelf (NWS) gas export precinct, which includes facilities like the Karratha Gas Plant and several offshore platforms.<sup>5</sup> If approved, the Burrup Hub will prolong the lifespan of the rapidly deteriorating NWS until 2070. Extending the NWS will fast track new gas production, locking Australia into production and export for the long haul. Over 80% of the gas extracted from the Burrup Hub is for export purposes.

If Tanya Plibersek approves the Burrup Hub, the projected emissions will be higher than all other proposed fossil fuel projects currently undergoing federal environmental approvals. It will be a monumental setback to Australia's commitment to limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees, undermining the world's progress towards phasing out fossil fuels.

Aerial shot of turquoise ocean & white sand near Ningaloo Reef  
© Tiffany Klein

4. Australian conservation foundation. (2024, March 21) [Woodside's Burrup Hub a climate bomb in the making.](#)  
5. Woodside Energy (2024) [North West Shelf.](#)



# A SLIPPERY SLOPE

## WHAT COULD GO WRONG?

### 1. The risk of oil spills and at-sea accidents

Woodside's data reveals how close the Burrup Hub's infrastructure is to critical marine habitats and coral reefs.<sup>6</sup> A blowout at one of Woodside's gas wells could see Scott Reef and neighbouring Sandy Islet covered in oily pollution, which could impact the surrounding habitats of Rowley Shoals Marine Park, Adele Island, and even reach Indonesian waters. This wouldn't be the first time. In 2016, a 10,500-litre spill occurred at the Cossack field on the North West Shelf, leaking a bathtub's worth of oil into WA waters every day for two months.<sup>7</sup> A worst-case scenario well blowout, spill or vessel rupture at the Burrup Hub could pollute the waters of multiple protected marine parks.

#### CASE STUDY: THE WORST-CASE SCENARIO

Woodside's own modelling suggests the risk of a well blowout is credible. For example, a blowout at the Torosa reservoir could result in 142,154 cubic metres of toxic condensate leaking into the ocean over 77 days.<sup>8</sup> This could devastate local communities and industries that depend on healthy reefs and marine life, including tourism and fisheries.

A total of 54 species could be directly impacted if disaster strikes at a Burrup Hub site. Among these are protected birds, sharks, snakes, fish and turtles<sup>9</sup> including:

#### Birds

Australian lesser noddy	Endangered
Abbott's booby	Endangered

Mapping of worst case oil spill scenarios in the Burrup Hub.

© Greenpeace

6. Greenpeace Australia Pacific. (2022, June 21). [Deep sea disaster: Why Woodside's Burrup Hub project is too risky.](#)

7. The Guardian (2017, May 19) [Woodside says it was behind oil spill that regulator kept secret.](#)

8. Greenpeace Australia Pacific. (2022, June 21). [Deep sea disaster: Why Woodside's Burrup Hub project is too risky.](#)

9. Greenpeace Australia Pacific. (2022, June 21). [Deep sea disaster: Why Woodside's Burrup Hub project is too risky.](#)



Whale Shark around Ningaloo  
Marine Park © Lewis Burnett



### Birds (cont.)

Eastern curlew	<b>Critically endangered</b>
Curlew sandpiper	<b>Critically endangered</b>
Red knot	<b>Endangered</b>
Great knot	<b>Critically endangered</b>
Greater sand plover	Vulnerable
Lesser sand plover	<b>Endangered</b>
Bar-tailed godwit	Vulnerable
North Siberian bar-tailed godwit	<b>Critically endangered</b>
Southern giant petrel	<b>Endangered</b>
Australian painted snipe	<b>Endangered</b>
Australian fairy tern	Vulnerable
Night parrot	<b>Critically endangered</b>
Far Eastern curlew	<b>Critically endangered</b>
Painted snipe	<b>Endangered</b>
Amsterdam albatross	<b>Critically endangered</b>
Wandering albatross	Vulnerable
Southern giant petrel	<b>Endangered</b>
Northern giant petrel	Vulnerable
Soft-plumaged petrel	Vulnerable
Indian yellow nosed albatross	<b>Endangered</b>
Tasmanian shy albatross	Vulnerable
Campbell albatross	Vulnerable
Black browed albatross	<b>Endangered</b>
White capped albatross	Vulnerable

### Sharks

Grey nurse shark	Vulnerable
Great white shark	Vulnerable
Whale shark	Vulnerable
Shortfin mako	<b>Endangered</b>
Longfin mako	<b>Endangered</b>

### Snakes

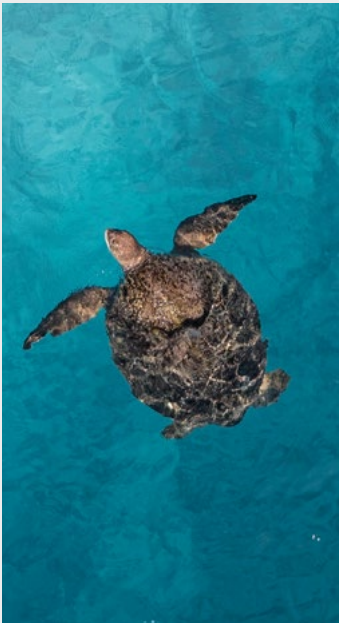
Dusky sea snake	<b>Endangered</b>
Short-nosed sea snake	<b>Critically endangered</b>
Olive python	Vulnerable

### Fish

Green sawfish	Vulnerable
Large-tooth sawfish	Vulnerable
River sawfish	Vulnerable

<b>Fish</b>	
Leichhardt’s sawfish	Vulnerable
Northern sawfis	Vulnerable
<b>Turtles</b>	
Green turtle	Vulnerable
Loggerhead turtle	<b>Endangered</b>
Hawksbill turtle	Vulnerable
Olive ridley turtle	<b>Endangered</b>
Flatback turtle	Vulnerable
Leatherback turtle	Vulnerable
<b>Whales</b>	
Pygmy blue whale	<b>Endangered</b>
Blue whale	<b>Endangered</b>
Sei whale	<b>Endangered</b>
Fin whale	<b>Endangered</b>

Green sea turtle, near Sandy Islet on the West Hook of Scott Reef © Alex Westover



2. Seabed subsidence on Scott Reef

Seabed subsidence, caused by extracting gas from underground reservoirs, could jeopardise Scott Reef.<sup>10</sup> When gas is extracted, it leads to a drop in pressure in the reservoir under the earth, which can trigger the seafloor above to sink. As the Browse gas field is directly under Scott Reef, this sinking of the seafloor poses risks to the integrity of the reef and the animals who nest there. Even a small case of sinking from subsidence could mean crucial nesting grounds for endangered sea turtles are lost under the ocean. Seabed subsidence can disrupt marine habitats, increase seismic activity, and endanger the fragile ecosystem of Scott Reef and its inhabitants.

**CASE STUDY:**  
**SCOTT REEF’S STRUGGLING SEA TURTLES**

Sea turtles are one of the most vulnerable species in the path of the Burrup Hub. Seabed subsidence, combined with the aggressive glow of gas flares and lights from vessels and infrastructure, could drastically alter turtle nesting grounds. At the heart of Scott Reef’s fragile ecosystem is Sandy Islet, a tiny sandbar barely two metres above sea level, which is an essential location for green sea turtles to nest. If Sandy Islet is washed away, their precious habitat and eggs could be lost at sea. This would jeopardise the populations’ reproductive cycles, nesting and hatching success, and could lead to a dip in population.

10. NOAA National Ocean Service. (2023). [Subsidence](#).



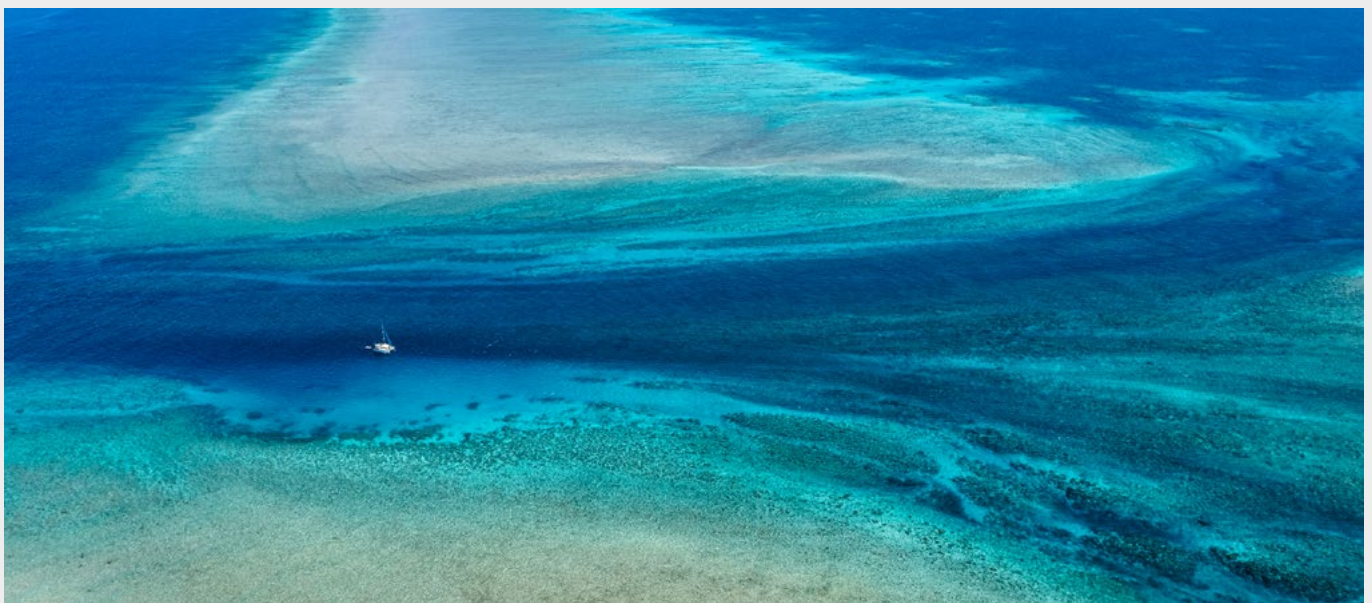
### 3. Light pollution throws nesting and migration off course

Gas flares and lights from structures like oil rigs and ships disorient sea turtles and confuse the migratory patterns of birds and fish. Newly hatched sea turtles rely on natural light cues to navigate to the ocean, but artificial lights can lead them away from the water and diminish their chances of survival. Changes in light conditions also affect plankton distribution, disrupting food chains. Artificial illumination impacts coastal communities, dimming night skies and causing navigational challenges for maritime industries.

### 4. Offshore drilling jeopardises marine ecosystems

Offshore drilling disrupts the ocean floor through sediment displacement and pollution from operations, such as releasing toxic chemicals in drilling muds. These pollutants can indirectly harm coral reefs and marine life, leading to long-term ecological damage.

Noise pollution from drilling interferes with the communication and hunting behaviours of whales and dolphins, disturbing their natural activities. Offshore drilling platforms also emit greenhouse gases and pollutants, degrading air quality and accelerating climate change – risking both marine life and human health.



Aerial View of Scott Reef © Alex Westover



# WOODSIDE'S TROUBLING TRACK RECORD

Woodside's credentials are chequered by gas explosions, oil spills, infrastructure neglect and dubious environmental decisions. Given this history, can they be trusted with a mega-project like the Burrup Hub? Some of their recent blunders include:

**Whale calf collision** In August 2023, a tugboat operated by a Woodside contractor collided with a whale calf in the Port of Dampier. The incident was confirmed by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) only after media inquiries.

**Explosion at Pluto LNG plant** In May 2023, an explosion rocked the Pluto LNG plant forcing a shutdown. Despite prior warnings about flaring gas and dark smoke, Woodside was accused by unions of downplaying the incident.<sup>11</sup>

**Northern Endeavour clean-up debacle** Woodside wriggled out of responsibility for the abandoned Northern Endeavour oil platform in the Timor Sea by selling it to a one-person operation. The 274-metre rust-riddled platform was shut down in 2020 amid safety warnings, leaving the offshore oil and gas industry to shoulder the \$325-million decommissioning cost.<sup>12 13</sup>

**Cost-cutting maintenance** Despite warnings from offshore regulator NOPSEMA about corrosion, Woodside announced a 30% cut in operating costs over three years starting in 2021, focusing on maintenance costs. As a result, there were serious structural integrity issues at multiple Woodside facilities.<sup>14</sup>

Woodside Energy  
Group Ltd operated  
Pluto LNG Park  
© Lewis Burnett

11. AFR. (2023, May 28). [Woodside investigates Pluto LNG plant incident](#). The Australian Financial Review.

12. WA Today. (2024, May 30). [Resources giants headed to court over \\$86 million clean-up bill](#). WA Today.

13. ABC News. (2023, June 10). [Northern Endeavour's \\$325m decommissioning begins](#).

14. Boiling Cold. (2021, July 9). [Concern over corrosion found at Woodside's North West Shelf LNG plant](#).

15. Boiling Cold. (2021, February 5). [Regulator tells Woodside to clean up oil field and may take legal action](#). Boiling Cold.



**Abandoned infrastructure** After halting oil extraction in the Enfield field in 2018, Woodside left behind the Nganhurra Riser Turret Mooring (RTM), an 83-metre-long, 2,452-tonne piece of infrastructure. Following an order from NOPSEMA to remove it, Woodside proposed to sink the toxic RTM near the World Heritage-listed Ningaloo Reef. It was finally removed in October 2023.<sup>15</sup>

**Oil spill in Cossack field** In 2016, a Woodside oil rig in the Cossack field leaked over 10,500 litres of oil into the ocean due to a degraded seal. Woodside claimed there was “no lasting impact to the environment” – a statement that was widely contested.<sup>16</sup>

16. Michael Slezak et al (May 19th, 2017), [‘Woodside says it was behind oil spill that regulator kept secret’](#), The Guardian



The Northern Endeavour, which became the responsibility of the federal government after its former owner went into liquidation © Boiling Cold

# A TIMELINE OF NEGLECT

## WA oil and gas blunders

From exploding pipelines to environmental carelessness, here's a rundown of incidents that have rocked WA's oil and gas industry, in which Woodside features heavily.





**FEBRUARY 2020****NORTHERN ENDEAVOUR, TIMOR SEA**

Woodside sells its abandoned Northern Endeavour oil platform, leaving taxpayers to shoulder over \$1 billion of decommissioning costs

**OCTOBER 2019****NINGALOO COAST**

Woodside's degraded Nganhurra Riser Turret Mooring (RTM) is found, triggering concerns about sinking highly toxic materials near Ningaloo Reef.

**APRIL, 2016****COSSACK FIELD, TIMOR SEA**

An unnamed rig in Woodside Petroleum's Cossack Field leaks 10,500 litres of oil over a two-month period.

**21 AUGUST 2009****TIMOR SEA**

PTTEP's West Atlas rig in the Montara oil field suffers a massive blowout, sparking an uncontrolled fire.

**3 JUNE 2008****VARANUS ISLAND**

A ruptured gas pipeline at Apache Energy's facility causes an explosion, sparking an energy shortage in WA and costing the state's economy billions.



Fire at the West Atlas rig and Montara well head © PTTEP ERG Media



# THE BURRUP HUB'S COST TO OUR PLANET

## 1. It's a climate threat

The Burrup Hub project isn't just another development. Over its 50-year lifespan, it's projected to spew a staggering 6.1 billion tonnes of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. This makes it Australia's most climate-polluting fossil fuel project by far, with the predicted emissions from Woodside's Burrup Hub higher than all other proposed fossil fuel projects currently undergoing federal environmental approvals.

## 2. It blows our carbon budget

Beyond carbon dioxide, the project will unleash substantial methane emissions throughout its lifetime. Methane is a potent greenhouse gas, which is 84 times more impactful than carbon dioxide over a 20-year period. If approved, the Burrup Hub would produce gas until around 2070 — 20 years after global climate commitments to reach net zero by 2050.

## 3. It doesn't benefit WA communities

Despite the Burrup Hub's massive carbon footprint, Western Australians aren't the ones profiting. Over 80% of its gas will be exported as LNG, largely to Asian markets such as Japan, China, South Korea and Taiwan. Ironically, Japan, our largest customer, may not even need our LNG, as demand has plummeted and is projected to continue falling. Japan profits by reselling our LNG while we shoulder the environmental burden.<sup>17</sup> The project overshadows the progress made by WA households to harness clean energy by installing solar panels on their roofs. Instead of embracing green exports as part of a sustainable future, this project will bind WA into prolonged gas dependency.<sup>18</sup>

## 4. It will slow the switch to renewable energy

As nearly 90% of Australians support the renewable energy transition,<sup>19</sup> greenlighting new fossil fuel projects like the Burrup Hub is a backward step. Extending gas exports until 2070 delays the urgent transition to renewables that our planet desperately needs. Gas is a dangerous and polluting fossil fuel that is driving the climate crisis, and is a roadblock to a clean, green future.

17. RenewEconomy. (2024, May 16). [Japan does not need Australian gas to keep the lights on in Tokyo.](#)

18. ABC News. (2024, September 19). [A small WA seaside town was forced to switch off gas, becoming a 'prototype' for the green energy transition.](#)

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