Dear EPA,

Please see my submission here in the email for the public consultation of the draft Climate Change Policy and draft Climate Change Action Plan:

The EPA's draft climate change policy and draft climate change action plan are important and positive steps for the agency and for the state of NSW.
The possibilities to improve state-level action on climate is well overdue, and the EPA is well placed to become a leader in making sound decisions to address climate change meaningfully.

One initiative that is particularly important and that the EPA could potentially be strong in influencing is ending the installation of reticulated gas in greenfield housing areas.

While currently and historically, the installation of gas has been a standard process in the creation of new suburbs, alongside other essential services such as electricity and water, the time for gas has ended.

The EPA's newfound strengths can hopefully be applied to then be able to influence and stop government departments and agencies involved in planning and development processes from continuing new gas infrastructure, pipes and connections in new builds and new development suburbs.

The EPA could play an influential role in NSW following suit of the ACT government in phasing out fossil fuel by 2045, and rapidly electrifying Canberra over the next 20 years.

Similarly, NSW could, with the EPA as a champion, see all new suburbs and estates being developed end the installation of gas mains in the infrastructure.

In economic terms and for energy efficiency, there are now good substitutes for the ways we traditionally have been using gas in the home, from electric induction stoves, solar heated hot water, and reverse cycle air conditioning.

Aside from the economic benefits, and perhaps most importantly the direct health benefits for the people of NSW could lie within the EPA's remits, both directly in terms of impacts to communities from gas pollution inside homes, and because of the new climate change emissions purview, given the role gas as a fossil fuel does play in climate change causation.

The health impacts of indoor gas in particular, though, are startling and need addressing in NSW and Australia, from causing asthma, and carbon monoxide poisoning.

Just like a burning coal in our open fireplaces was the norm, especially in cities like Newcastle littered with coal seams and mines, we now know, recognise and should stop burning gas in our houses.

As a local Novocastrian in Newcastle, my siblings and I laugh uneasily at the stories our parents tell of using lumps of coal to heat our family home when we were little. They are almost proud that they used to walk along the train tracks and fill bags with free coal that had fallen off the load carriages. The same railway lines crisscrossing Newcastle still shunt the black coal from the mines to the city's west into the harbour that hosts one of the world's largest coal port (and the particulates and dust that falls from uncovered wagons just another example of fossil fuel pollution we live with)

But just like the community was slow to recognise how harmful the particulate inhalation was from our poorly built fireplaces and the terrible energy source of burning coal in our homes, eventually, the change was made. I remember more clearly the electric bar heaters that we then had.

Similarly, and with a dawning recognition, I now find myself thinking about the impact on my children's health when I use my gas stove top and oven for our dinners and in our poorly-ventilated federation house kitchen.

If the EPA is about to embark on exciting new endeavours to address its duties better to manage climate change and emissions, one positive improvement the EPA can work on is to effectively contribute to planning decisions (and other cross-departmental work) to end all gas reticulation being installed in new developments and builds.

In this arena, the EPA's role would be one of offering advice, research and expertise rather than having decisions making powers per se, but rather to be a much-needed and important proponent in an important step towards decarbonisation of our state.

Dr Bronwyn McDonald