

January 12, 2017

TO: Governor Jay Inslee  
416 14<sup>th</sup> Ave. SW  
Olympia, WA 98504  
RE: LNG plant in Tacoma

Dear Governor Inslee,

We are founding faculty members of the University of Washington Tacoma. Twelve of us arrived in Tacoma in 1990 to build, from the ground up, an institution to become an essential part of the South Sound's intellectual life and an engine of positive economic growth. With help from UW Seattle, the Tacoma business and cultural community, the many faculty and staff members hired since, and thousands of students who have passed through our doors, UW Tacoma has indeed come to enrich the South Sound's global and local aspirations, providing first-rate educational opportunities. It is with deep concern for Tacoma that we are speaking out about the ill-advised plans for PSE's liquefied natural gas facility.

As everyone knows, Tacoma's copper smelter in Ruston was both an employer and a blight for a hundred years. The infamous ASARCO smokestack came down in 1993, but the plant left toxic pollution across a 1,000-square mile area in four counties. ASARCO always denied that its operations posed health risks; the plant was never properly regulated, and even when emissions limits were imposed in the 1960s, the company found ways not to meet them. Following ASARCO's bankruptcy settlement in 2009, the EPA has been left to handle arsenic and lead soil cleanups.

Surely such folly in the name of industrial development could not occur in a major urban environment now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In 2016, a \$3.6 billion plan by a Chinese-backed company to build the world's largest methanol plant in the Port of Tacoma was canceled due to public outcry and an "overlong" environmental review process that made the project no longer attractive to its planners. The Tacoma public had learned about long-term pollution caused by large companies that promise jobs, lay waste to land, fail to make adequate reparation, and then leave to pursue more profitable ventures elsewhere.

Puget Sound Energy (PSE), now building its LNG plant, has been owned since 2009 by foreign investors: the Macquarie Group, a global investment banking and diversified financial services group based in Sydney. Because of its reputation for lucrative and predatory deals, Macquarie is known in Australia as the "millionaire's factory." On the eve of Tacoma's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Port, local government's endorsement of this fossil fuel project and its ASARCO- and methanol-reminiscent corporate-speak is disturbing and perplexing.

Some major reasons for seeing LNG as Tacoma's Folly:

**Jobs.** One argument repeatedly invoked in favor of the facility is the number of jobs it would bring to Tacoma and the Port. PSE itself maintains that after the initial construction, the total number of permanent jobs will be 18.

**“Greenwashing.”** As PSE and TOTE Maritime would have it, the LNG facility is the most environmentally progressive project that has ever come to Tacoma. But PSE’s claims of “clean energy” have been disputed by environmental scientists and engineers who counter-claim that tons of greenhouse gases, toxic emissions, and volatile organic compounds would result from the extraction and liquefaction processes, and that LNG is in sum an accelerator of climate change. Reputedly safe, well-built pipelines routinely leak, burn, and explode, releasing millions of gallons of toxic substances and destroying wildlife and arable land.<sup>1</sup>

**Safety.** In the event of vapor clouds, liquid gas spills, fire, or explosions, there are serious questions regarding the ability of local emergency-response agencies to contain damage. PSE absurdly maintains that any accident at the plant site would cause no damage beyond its property line. (A LNG tanker truck explosion in Australia several days ago, carrying 1/400<sup>th</sup> the fuel that would be stored in Tacoma’s facility, necessitated an evacuation zone of 1.6 miles around.) Scientists estimate that an explosion here would create an incineration zone with a 3-mile radius. The nearby Tacoma Northwest Detention Center has come up with a policy that instructs detainees to “remain in place” in the event of an explosion, a policy that would result in more than 1500 dead bodies. The fire station that PSE promises to refurbish would be much closer, so any firefighters on site would most likely be killed and all equipment destroyed.<sup>2</sup> UW Tacoma and much more of downtown lies within the hypothetical three-mile blast zone. Area hospitals’ burn units, including Seattle’s, have far fewer than 100 beds in case of such a catastrophic event.

In light of the fact that climate change is inevitably leading to sea level rise, local governments’ support of a LNG plant on the tide flats is all the more inexplicable.

**Indigenous treaty rights.** Puyallup treaty rights and fishing rights must be respected by local governments. 28 Northwest tribes have united to oppose the LNG facility. In the enlightened 21<sup>st</sup> century, greater sensitivity and respect need to be paid to the shameful history of the US government’s treatment of indigenous peoples--a history of massacres, land-grabs and forced relocations and “re-education” of children, and treaties signed by

---

<sup>1</sup> For a partial list of pipeline accidents in the US since 2000, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_pipeline\\_accidents\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States\\_in\\_the\\_21st\\_century](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_pipeline_accidents_in_the_United_States_in_the_21st_century)

<sup>2</sup> As part of mitigation, PSE is supposed to pay to reopen the fire station. Part of reopening plus \$1.5 million operating costs annually have already been shifted to the Tacoma general fund.

tribal leaders who did not read English. The LNG site abuts Native land—many claim it actually sits *on* Native land—and to say that it poses especial danger to the tribe and causes ill will is putting it mildly.

**The public good subordinated to economic interests.** We are strongly suspicious of the support of PSE by local government. PSE and Macquarie have spent many millions in greenwashing public relations. PSE would not be liable in case of accidents; we understand that liability would be shifted to the Tacoma public.

PSE's persistence in building the facility despite permitting delays and violations is not in itself illegal, but demonstrates their confidence in the power of government and big business to find ways to dismiss growing public awareness and opposition. TOTE Maritime is converting ships to run on LNG as well as crude oil. What are the pressures and rewards that have secured local governing bodies' endorsement of Tacoma's urban LNG production, and where is real concern for public health and safety?

China, Norway, and others are developing completely electric-powered cargo ships producing zero emissions independent from fossil fuel use. There is also great potential for wind and solar power for freight ships. What if our area, with all its scientific, engineering, and entrepreneurial talent and advantageous geographical position, were also to place itself at the forefront of these *really* clean-energy developments? Could the lessons learned from ASARCO and other industrial holdovers from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries transform Tacoma into a truly 21<sup>st</sup> century model city? It hurts to see our region so compromised by the lure of short-term gain, the seduction of corporate false promises, the continued marginalization of its first peoples, and the power of big business at the expense of public health, safety, and real imagination.

We say no.

With best wishes,

Dr. Claudia Gorbman, Professor Emerita, School of Interdisciplinary Arts & Sciences (SIAS), University of Washington Tacoma

Dr. Michael Kalton, Professor Emeritus, SIAS, UW Tacoma

Dr. Rob Crawford, Professor Emeritus, SIAS, UW Tacoma

Dr. Anthony D'Costa, former Professor, SIAS; currently Professor and Director of Development Studies, School of Social & Political Sciences, University of Melbourne

Dr. James F. Brown, Professor Emeritus, SIAS, UW Tacoma