To be presented by Nick Grollman at Vic/Tas Branch Meeting on Wednesday, 21 September, 1994.

"ENVIRONMENTAL AND INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON AUSTRALIA'S NATURAL GAS RESOURCE"

Natural gas is widely advocated as the "fuel of choice" for the East Asia-Pacific region over the next several decades owing to its versatility, its relative abundance and wide distribution compared to oil, and especially its environmental advantages over other fossil fuels. Energy scenarios for the region show a doubling or even tripling of the volumes of natural gas in the projected energy mix in the year 2010 compared to 1990. However, the opportunity that gas offers as a bridge to an ecologically sustainable energy future should not be squandered by using it principally as an incremental fuel source for the industrialised countries of the region, nor simply as a substitute for oil or coal without any overall reduction in energy consumption. Current energy trends in the region, nevertheless, appear to be pointing in this direction and are inconsistent with the obligations of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change on its signatories, which include Australia, China and Japan, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

This talk addresses, in the context of global environmental imperatives, the concept of a gas-centred energy strategy for the East Asia-Pacific region. Such a strategy should aim to provide an adequate level of energy services throughout the region at a fraction of the current environmental costs. The talk includes a review of current proposals for regional co-operation in energy technology and service delivery. Options for Australia in this context are to hold onto indigenous gas resources for domestic use; to pursue increased international trade in an increasingly globalised gas market; or to participate in regional programs involving the provision of development aid, transfer of technology and export of gas to developing country markets. Each option provides scope for stepping up the search for gas resources in Australia but each implies different environmental outcomes.