I want add a complicating factor into the conversation and highlight the way fossil fuels are going to disrupt and destabilize a sustainable ocean economy both at a system level and at a context specific level.

The fossil fuel industry here in Australia and globally is driving catastrophic climate change that is going to completely disrupt the marine environment in ways we can’t predict.

As the planet heats up the ocean is warming too. This is the case especially for Tasmania, which is warming four times faster than the global average. Australia isplaying a direct role in this. We are the world’s third largest fossil fuel exporter. The government is approving coal projects that run into the middle of this century.

There are over 100 new gas and coal projects earmarked for development in Australia. If they all go ahead they will emit the equivalent emissions of Russia - the world’s 4th largest polluter - every year. In Tasmania offshore oil and gas exploration is happening in the bass basin right now. We are still subsidising the search for new fossil fuels.

The fossil fuel industry is a direct threat to a sustainable economy whether its aquaculture, tourism, conservation, whatever.

Despite the impact climate change and fossil fuels are having on oceans, including Tasmania’s oceans, it is being proposed that oceans can play a role in prolonging and expanding fossil fuel use and production - globally and in Australia.

No one is using those words, but that’s what it is. There are two ways this is happening: with the use of carbon offsets and with carbon capture and storage. [I can talk about CCS in the bass strait during the discussion but I want to focus on the offsets]

You have probably heard the term blue carbon. This is the carbon that marine and coastal ecosystems like saltmarshes, seagrass, and temperate reefs store in their sediment and soil. The government and the private sector have become very focused on protecting and restoring these ecosystems and that is good. But the focus is on using this carbon stored to offset the carbon emitted by industry.

Carbon offsetting is when someone effectively pays you for you carrying out an activity that reduces or avoids carbon dioxide emissions so that they can keep polluting.

There are two problems with this.[ Well there are a lot of problems with this, but I’ll stick to the two biggest: ]

1. To be clear, restoring ecosystems is critical. They provide critical habitat; they protect from erosion; they provide food.

But to have any chance of slowing down the current rate of climate change we are at the point where we need to be doing everything. We need to stop approving new fossil fuel projects, we need to phase out existing use AND we need to restore ecosystems. It’s not one or the other. The science says weneed to do it all.

But that is not how it is working. In Australia the government is literally allowing entire NEW gas basins to be opened because *some* of the emissions will be offset by gas companies. Not all, some. Opening a gas basin because you’ve rewetted a wetland is insanity - you might have saved some habitat but climate change is going to kill it and a lot more if we keep burning fossil fuels.

2. Secondly, It is going to get harder and harder to protect these ecosystems in heating oceans, let alone restore them. What happens when a seagrass meadow that has been used to offset a gas project dies because of a heatwave? The people who run the project are probably liable for the loss of carbon. And you now have double the CO2 in the atmosphere, which has a compounding effect.

Fossil fuel driven climate change is already disrupting Tasmania’s ocean, but now it’s now going to be under pressure to play a role in providing that fig leaf for gas companies.

100% we need to protect and restore the environment, but we need to ask questions about who is paying for it, and why , and in what context. In Australia government has its foot on the accelerator approving new fossil fuel projects but justifying it because “nature”. Minister plibersek said it herself: “if we are doing more polluting in one area, we have to compensate for that as a nation by planting trees, planting mangroves, investing in these blue carbon projects”. The result is more emissions not less.

A critical role that all industries play is a co-ordinated response to Australia’s fossil fuel expansion and the billions of dollars subsidising it etc..because this will affect you all.