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Member for Rodney

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GOV'T BARRELS AHEAD WITH PIPELINE CHARADE

The Victorian Government quietly unveiled several proposed routes for the controversial north-south pipeline today in an effort to circumnavigate a public backlash from country Victoria, according to The Nationals Member for Rodney Paul Weller.

The move comes despite demands from the Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett last week that a study be conducted to assess the project's environmental impacts.

Mr Weller said today's announcement, which he described as "underhanded and calculated", reiterated the arrogance of the Victorian Labor Government.

"I don't think it was coincidental that this report was released the same day the Coalition was locked away in meetings," Mr Weller said from Ballarat.

"Despite all their talk about minimising the environmental impacts of this pipeline, Mr Brumby and his henchmen have proved that they will stop at nothing to get this pipe through to Melbourne.

Mr Weller said although Mr Garrett had to approve the project before it could proceed, the State Government had openly flaunted its plans to push ahead without the necessary Environmental Effects Statement.

"Legally, when the Federal Government's Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts made the pipeline a 'controlled action' last week, a stop should have been placed on all construction work.

"Landowners were naturally sceptical last night about the legitimacy of the intervention when drilling machinery was moved onto private land at Killingworth on the Goulburn River, where the proposed pumping station is to be located."

Mr Weller said the Victorian Government had been instructed to assess the impact of the pipeline on the 90 threatened and endangered species of flora and fauna, before reporting back with a recommendation to Mr Garrett's department.

So far any work to assess the environmental impacts of the pipeline had been carried out by the Sugarloaf Pipeline Project Alliance, which was anything but independent, he said.

"If Mr Garrett's calls for review are to have any credibility, an environmental assessment must be undertaken by an independent body, not government agencies."