



**TASA** The Australian  
Sociological Association

**TITLE: Changes around risk-safety knowledge and practice in the Australian Energy Pipeline Industry: the influence of deregulation and energy pipeline privatization.**

Author/s: Dolruedee Kramnaimuang King

Affiliation/s: Australian National University

Contemporary research on neoliberalism around energy sectors has critiqued market-driven mechanisms associated with neoliberalism. Dominant criticisms are that neoliberal programmes support elite institutions taking control of energy services and setting prices, detrimental to the public interest. I argue that undertaking research with *a priori* theoretical suppositions may omit unexamined and crucial narratives. I take a critiqueempirical approach grounded in investigating how pipeline regulators construct knowledge-power and practice on risk and safety in and around pipeline energy industries in Australia by examining what conditions have influenced knowledge and practice, by who and how. Despite a lack of researcher presumptions about neoliberalism and its influence, one of the themes that emerged involved the impact of neoliberalism. The findings indicate that neoliberal characteristics in the forms of deregulation and contract chains were employed as part of government-industry function before the neoliberal reform in the 1990s. Nevertheless, after the reform had occurred the consequences from deregulation and energy privatization have been an aggravating factor as presented in three key findings: (a) regulators face difficulties in mitigating pipeline risks, in particular around interconnected pipelines between states, (b) inadequacies involving the transference of risk knowledge and safety practice among pipeline technicians, and (c) deficits in accountability.