

**Submission
No 210**

SUSTAINABILITY OF ENERGY SUPPLY AND RESOURCES IN NSW

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Date Received: 15 September 2019

TO: NSW Government Inquiry into Sustainability of Energy Supply and Resources

FROM: Nicola Chirlian, Farmer, [REDACTED]

I welcome the opportunity to submit briefly to this much needed inquiry. As a farmer on the Liverpool Plains, I am very aware and concerned about the current government policies at State and Federal levels, which are, to my mind, biased towards energy supply by fossil fuel extraction, and corresponding approval of mining projects. The current policies impact deeply on regional communities, on water security for these communities, the environment and public health.

I have been concerned for many years about what is, in my opinion, the overdevelopment of the fossil fuel industry in Australia and specifically in the Hunter Valley and the Gunnedah Basin, to what is becoming clear, the detriment of agriculture. To my mind, there has been a naivety in Government in accepting that mining and agriculture can co-exist. I firmly believe that we have been in deliberate denial about climate change impact, and now that we are in the grip of the worst drought in our history, we must face these impacts, and try as quickly as possible to move into a period of transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy. There is no doubt that there are other factors intensifying climate change, but mining and use of fossil fuels to provide power is of major impact.

I believe that we have a huge capacity to move quickly to renewable energy and that this move will, in turn, create many economic opportunities for workers currently employed in fossil fuel mining industry. I would draw the Committee's attention to the Hunter Renewal Project. This is being driven by local communities in the Hunter to develop plans to create a "just" transition away from coal mining in such a manner that the communities remain economically viable, with alternative secure employment. I would draw the Committee's attention to the "Road Map" developed in community forums (see www.hunterrenewal.org.au), and note that the Joint Organisation of Councils in the Hunter have received the Project in a positive manner.

I welcomed a recent article from the Federal Government's Australian Renewable Energy Agency regarding investment priorities (<http://arena.gov.au/blog/arena-investment-priorities>): to integrate renewables into the electricity system; accelerating the growth of the hydrogen industry and supporting industry to reduce emissions. Anecdotal evidence from those in the renewable industries reassure me that business is not waiting for government action, with accelerating pace of adoption of renewable energy technologies and a rapidly increase in affordability. Government needs to openly support these businesses.

Regional communities have long been impacted by the energy and resource sector. There are well known "boom and bust" cycles with mining, with negative impacts of the flyin-flyout workforce on these communities being documented at a federal level. (2013 Standing Committee in to FIFO). Agricultural enterprise is drained of workforce, youth and experience, with agriculture largely unable to match the wages paid. A "have and have not" split develops. Rental accommodation costs become inflated, with rural workers becoming unable to afford good housing.

There is wide-scale community rejection of the CSG industry in North West NSW: Comprehensive community-run door-to-door surveys were in 2015 undertaken in the North West, spanning an area of over 3.5 million hectares to date. These communities have unilaterally declared their districts Gas field free with an average of 96% wanting to remain Gas field free, making it clear that there is no social licence to operate the Narrabri Gas Project. A door to door survey of more than 800 homes in

the township of Narrabri at the end of 2018 revealed only 28% support the Narrabri Gas Project and 54% are opposed to it. ReachTEL polling, commissioned for the Independent candidate in the March 2015 State election, showed 87% of people across the broad NW NSW region encompassing Santos PEL areas are concerned about CSG mining; 63% “very concerned” and 24% “concerned”.

Specific objections to the Narrabri Gas project cover environmental and water issues. Concerns include:

- It will extract over 35 billion litres of groundwater, much of it in the first five years. This water will be treated and in the early years will generate tens of thousands of tonnes of salt that needs to be disposed of.
- It will clear close to 1,000 hectares of the Pilliga, the largest temperate woodland in New South Wales, home to unique wildlife and crucially important to the spiritual, cultural and social life of Gamilaraay people.
- It will cause draw down of a recharge aquifer of the Great Artesian Basin, a water resource relied upon by rural communities across western NSW.
- It is not justified: Santos’ own CSG export activities in Queensland have caused gas prices to rise and supply to become unpredictable. NSW should respond to this by investing in more reliable and ultimately cheaper renewable energy, not by letting Santos inflict more environmental, social and economic harm.
- It will cause economic upheaval in Narrabri and put agricultural industries at risk.
- CSG is harmful to health. Neither the NSW Government nor Santos have investigated or dealt with the serious health effects of coal seam gas now appearing in peer-reviewed research in the United States.

Returning to the coal industry, there have been well documented concerns with this industry for many years. The burning of coal emits hazardous air pollutants, including particulate matter, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, carbon dioxide, mercury and arsenic. The medical group “Doctors For the Environment” have been providing details of negative health impacts of the coal industry and have focussed specifically on the Hunter Valley (<https://www.dea.org.au/coal/>). Dr Tuan Au from Singleton, has publicly expressed concern about coalmining impacts on Upper Hunter residents from 2012, being disturbed by the high number of children attending doctors’ surgeries throughout Singleton with symptoms of asthma and other respiratory problems. Dr Au pointed to 2010 industry figures which showed that mines emitted 18million kilograms of dust, 7.4million kilograms of nitrogen oxides and 4.9million kilograms of carbon monoxide around Singleton in the 12 months to the end of June 2009.

In closing, I would emphasise that fossil fuel extraction is a water hungry and wasteful industry. We have a choice – extract and use water to wash coal; extract, pollute and discard water in the coal seam gas industry or move towards renewable energy sources that do not require water consumption. In this future, water is in its rightful place – in the ground, in the rivers and dams where it is viewed as the most precious resource to support life.