

**Submission
No 179**

INQUIRY INTO COAL SEAM GAS

Organisation: Tourism Advancing Gloucester

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Submission to NSW Legislative Council's Inquiry on Coal Seam Gas

Submitted on behalf of 'Tourism Advancing Gloucester'

Background to our position and our submission

Tourism Advancing Gloucester (TAG) is a group of local tourism operators working together to grow the tourism industry in Gloucester, at the foot of Barrington Tops National Park in the hinterland of the mid north coast. Like most community groups in town, it operates on a volunteer basis and spends considerable efforts doing fundraising for its cause. Contributions raised are used in projects to promote Gloucester as a destination and thereby benefit the whole town.

Tourism is worth more than \$28 million annually to Gloucester. Recently, TAG compiled and agreed the following Brand Values and Mission Statement. These are now used as a reference point for all our activities, as they specify our sense of purpose. Together they encapsulate our values and visions, our members and community, and our stakeholders.

- **Brand Values for Gloucester:**

1. scenic drives, pretty rivers and productive farming valleys
2. village atmosphere, old world charm
3. friendly people, country hospitality
4. gourmet cafes and wineries
5. boutique shopping on a relaxed main street
6. extensive accommodation choices for any budget
7. world heritage-listed nature for adventure and wellbeing

- **Mission Statement for Tourism Advancing Gloucester:**

Harnessing the strength of tourists and day-trippers to sustainably grow all small businesses in Gloucester.

Addressing the Terms of Reference

This submission addresses the Inquiry's Terms of Reference at Point 2, regarding the **economic and social implications of CSG activities** including its impact on: food security, agricultural activity, regional development and employment (tourism specifically here).

The social impact of CSG mining and extraction activities

Gloucester residents have first hand experience of the social impact of mining (also euphemistically called 'extraction' by the latest corporate raiders to our valley as they attempt to whitewash their activities). Residents know that they have few rights when it comes to any type of mining; they know that mining companies have deep pockets and batteries of lawyers; they know that successive governments have become addicted to mining royalties; they know that no government will stand up to large mining interests; they know that the Gloucester community is becoming divided on these issues, with blame being apportioned to the so-called 'blow-ins'; and these new residents know that the reasons they moved to Gloucester are likely to be destroyed in front of their eyes.

Can agriculture and CSG mining co-exist?

Tourism Advancing Gloucester (TAG) believes that Gloucester's tourism businesses rely heavily on the Brand Values stated above, and so anything that's detrimental to these values will have a negative impact on these businesses. The productive farms of Gloucester, including farm tours and farm stays, add to the scenic beauty and tourism experiences of the town. These are important contributions to tourism by agriculture in Gloucester and are essential components of our Brand Values. So TAG believes that in Gloucester, agriculture cannot co-exist with CSG mining.

Is the value of agriculture ranked higher than that of CSG mining?

By what measure should 'economic value' be judged? Do you wish to measure contribution to GDP for the country, state, region or farm? Or the pure dollar value of the final product? Or the number of people employed directly and indirectly? How about the number of households in the nation that rely on a strong food production industry to deliver affordable food for their table? What about the opportunity cost of lost food production as each farm is swallowed by a mine? Or the number of additional doctors and hospital beds that would be needed if the freshness and quality of our food continues to decline with every extra food-mile travelled by imported food?

TAG believes that Gloucester's tourism businesses rely heavily on the Brand Values stated above, and so anything that's detrimental to these values will have a negative impact on these businesses. As stated above, agriculture contributes significantly to tourism in Gloucester. CSG mining works hard against the scenic beauty of Gloucester, adding a slow uglification to a region long-recognised for its beauty; it destroys productive farming land; and it detracts from the tourism experiences of the town. As all these things are directly opposed to tourism then TAG believes that in Gloucester, agriculture has a much higher value than CSG mining.

Should land offsets be allowed for CSG mining developments?

Using land offsets is the ultimate expression of the cynical approach of mining companies to the environment. They only "care for the environment" when forced to do so by legislation or public pressure. They will look for the easiest way around the blockage and will nominate land that they are unlikely to ever consider for mining. Their cynical approach will be "Let's protect that impossible-to-mine mountain top as environmental offset for the obliteration we inflict down in the valley."

Additional questions should be considered:

- a) Do we as a community value the habitats and diversity of our local environment more than the value we place on the products of mining?
- b) Are we prepared to continue removing more habitats and putting more species under extinction pressures in exchange for the products of mining?

TAG believes that our world heritage-listed nature for adventure and wellbeing is a key component of Gloucester's Brand Values stated above. Any destruction of habitat for mining operations will adversely affect the well-established perception that here in Gloucester, nature is respected and protected. TAG believes that swapping the destruction of one threatened habitat for the protection of another threatened habitat is morally wrong, it will negatively impact tourism and it does not fit with Gloucester's values.

Should CSG mining occur in scenic or environmental protection areas?

Gloucester has an unbeatable brand positioning of being the closest town to Barrington Tops. This unique selling proposition is immensely strengthened by the world heritage listing of the national park, which also has a beneficial affect on all other parks and conservation areas in the region. On top of this world-recognised accolade, the Vale of Gloucester has been listed by the National Trust since 1975 and just a few weeks ago this was upgraded to specify that the recognised area is from Booral to Barrington. The listing title has been amended to the *Stroud Gloucester Valley, incorporating the Vale of Gloucester* and so our beautiful region is now a declared 'significant heritage landscape.'

TAG believes that scenic beauty and high-value environmental areas are an essential component of Gloucester's Brand Values as stated above. Any activity that threatens this key component, mining or otherwise, threatens our businesses. A valley full of smoking coal seam gas wells, plus hectares of open-cut mines right up to the town's first backyard will turn Gloucester into the 'Singleton of the mid north coast.' Ask Singleton Chamber of Commerce how much tourism they get...Gloucester will get the same. And as there are no 'mine-viewing' tourism segments identified by Tourism Australia or Tourism NSW that could be targeted, the majority of Gloucester's tourism operators will suffer downturns and close. So TAG believes that the whole of the Gloucester/Stroud region, as recognised by The National Trust, should be protected by council as being significant scenic heritage landscape, with all types of mining prohibited within it.

Should CSG mining companies undertake an economic assessment of mining to compare with existing economic activity and social, environmental and community impact?

The short answer is yes, of course. But if you just look at existing land use then it's highly unlikely that a dollar value comparison will give a valid like-for-like comparison. It doesn't take a genius to know which farm-gobbling, beauty-destroying industry will have the biggest bag of cash on the counter at the end of such a simplified analysis! What about including an analysis of alternate land uses such as intensive food production, carbon sequestering and green energy solutions? And any community impact analysis should be required to include responses on highly relevant 21st century issues of carbon emissions, carbon capture, food security, water security, community cohesion, community health risks, environmental health risks, biodiversity and habitat protection.

TAG believes that the true indicator of economic value to our region is from sustainable, long-term contributions to the Gloucester economy. CSG mining is not sustainable, as they drill and pump it out until it's all gone, then they move on. What will happen to Gloucester in 30 years time when the mines have finished their extractions and all that remains is a one-industry town justifiably worried about its future? The NSW town of Kandos just lost its one big employer – the cement factory. No doubt it was the town's saviour 30 years ago, but it wasn't sustainable and now Kandos is cactus.

So in 30 years time, which government department will bail out a Gloucester that's been mined out? The current plans for unchecked mining activities in Gloucester will destroy our productive farmlands, ruin our pristine rivers, poke the eye out of Gloucester's scenic beauty and deliver a dead tourism industry. But who will then contribute millions of dollars in transitional support for a town about to die? Not the mining companies.

Water security issues

CSG mining companies are currently hiding behind the words of "We comply with all Government requirements". Unfortunately those requirements are usually lame and tame. And the department that approves mining exploration is different to the department that approves the mine and which certainly isn't the department that has stewardship of our water resources. The fact that the coal seam gas industry in Queensland has 1500 compliance criteria is an indication of the many risks of this particular mining activity.

TAG believes that pristine rivers and aquifers are an essential component of Gloucester's Brand Values as stated above. Any activity that threatens this key component, mining or otherwise, threatens our businesses. Dried-up streams from disappearing aquifers and murky mining discharge in our pristine rivers will sink Gloucester tourism faster than a mid-river rock. So TAG believes CSG mines should not be allowed within a 10km buffer zone from any river.

Air quality issues

There are already many studies on the affects of poor air quality on the health of the most vulnerable community members - children and seniors - of any community located close to mining operations. It travels much more than the 1km buffer zone proposed by our local council. No-one would dispute the right to enjoy fresh, clean air, especially when located so close to world heritage listed national parks, forests and conservation areas.

TAG believes that air quality issues are detrimental to Gloucester's Brand Values stated above. Dusty air filled with particulates will impact on our visitor's peaceful enjoyment of the region, with immediate knock-on affect against visitor satisfaction, against word-of-mouth recommendations, against visitor numbers and against the economic contribution of tourism to Gloucester. Visitors from bustling cities and towns come to our region for the fresh air, clean rivers and emerald green scenery they believe can be found year-round in Gloucester. Dry coughs, dusty skin and gritty eyes hardly make for an enjoyable holiday, so every dusty particle inhaled will be echoed by the sound of Gloucester tourism choking. So TAG believes the 1km buffer zone for dust should be extended to 10km.

Noise impact issues

On quiet rural land, any noise travels easily and Gloucester's steep-sided valleys push the sounds of heavy machinery to the far corners of the valley. It travels much more than the 1km buffer zone proposed by our local council. And low frequency noise is now a medically-recognised hazard to physical health and mental health.

TAG believes that noise impact from CSG mining is detrimental to Gloucester's Brand Values stated above. As per the comments above for air quality, noise will impact on our visitor's peaceful enjoyment of the region, with immediate knock-on affect against visitor satisfaction, against word-of-mouth recommendations, against visitor numbers and against the economic contribution of tourism to Gloucester. The soothing peace and quiet of our region is what draws visitors and is an essential component of our Brand Values. The constant rumbling of heavy mining machinery is not conducive to a relaxed holiday, so every decibel heard is a scream against Gloucester tourism. TAG believes the 1km buffer zone for noise should be extended to 10km.

Additional assessment criteria for assessing social impact

TAG believes that additional criteria should be included when assessing social impact:

1. An analysis of the impact of job transference to mining, with the phenomenon of the 'disappearing tradie'. (eg. long waiting times to get a builder or tradesman in Gloucester because the qualified tradies are now working fulltime for the mines.)
2. An analysis of lost tourism-generated revenue for the town, due to mining-induced shortages of short-term accommodation. (eg. mining companies booking out midweek accommodation with low-dispersal guests, that prevents tourist coach stop-overs in Gloucester with high-dispersal guests.)

General health issues

As stated at the beginning of this submission, there is considerable anxiety and stress generated by impending CSG mining activities in Gloucester that compounds the stress from the ever-expanding activities of our existing coal mines. This should be included in any assessment of CSG mining and should address the worries from anticipated financial losses from reduced land values, reduced agricultural output and reduced quality of that output. The stress of living in a community divided by mining affects neighbours, friends, business colleagues and even membership of community groups. Some friendships are forever shattered by perceptions of mining-induced self-interest, clouded judgement and sell-outs.

TAG believes that such stresses on the community add to mental health issues as well as physical health issues. Gloucester tourism operators are no different from other community members who worry about the affects on their businesses from CSG mining activities, although it must be said that mining has brought some additional business to some operators. But our tourism businesses rely heavily on the Brand Values stated above, and anything that's detrimental to these values will have a negative impact on the majority of these businesses.

For those local tourism operators that employ local staff, the potential knock-on affects to the economic contribution to Gloucester is always on their minds, with impacts on general health never far behind. "Worried sick?" Well, yes.

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Submitted on behalf of **Tourism Advancing Gloucester**
by Thomas Davey, Chairperson

02 September 2011