

**Submission
No 175**

INQUIRY INTO COAL SEAM GAS

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Date received: 5/09/2011

SUBMISSION

RECEIVED

5 SEP 2011

LEGISLATIVE
COUNCIL

To The Director,
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5
Parliament House,
Macquarie Street,
Sydney 2000

From Jeanette Gow,

Subject: Coal Seam Gas Mining.

Over the years, various political issues have divided the community. However, I have never before witnessed such a unity of opinion as is evidenced in the current opposition to CSG Mining. I have closely monitored the local press, TV and Radio and there appears unanimous support for a long-term Moratorium and enquiries to halt the rampant and damaging mining activities by CSG companies. The only support for this mining comes from the industry itself which is set to make millions of dollars profit, with little regard for the environment and the disrupted lifestyles of land-owners. I have spoken with friends who are alarmed by this situation but aren't adept in writing official letters & submissions; so it is on their behalf as well as my own that I submit this document.

There have been meetings held in the Northern Rivers area which have been well attended, with traumatised land-owners from SE Queensland, travelling long distances to warn us of environmental damage and the dishonest & bullying tactics used by CSG companies. These farmers bitterly regret having signed an agreement with CSG companies whose platitudes hid a dangerous agenda. There have been reports of the 24/7 noise from generators operating several kilometres from houses which has caused sleep disturbance and a decline in general health. These landholders also report illegal clearing of trees and the press carries reports of accidents and carelessness caused by CSG miners. Furthermore, rather than the few innocuous drills purported, their farms have been defaced by a multiplicity of bores plus connecting infrastructure plus the general overpowering presence of workers & vehicles.

The government must also heed the sorry list of damaging events in overseas countries which have lead to their governments calling a halt to CSG mining. The fracking has also caused seismic disturbance

There is an immense fear that our precious Great Artesian Basin will be permanently polluted from fracking activities. Fines for breaches by CSG miners will not reverse any pollution caused and will hardly dent the immense financial resources of the mining industry. Even if BTEX chemicals are not used by the drillers, this chemical can be released into the air from deep underground. Presently there is a spirited

protest against Metagasco's plans to cut a swathe through a World Heritage Forest in the Border Ranges National Park for a pipeline to transport gas from Casino up to southern Queensland. These mining companies feel that they have governmental blessing to cause environmental damage no other person or group of people is permitted to do.

There have been complaints appearing in the local press by farmers affected by the recent LEP plans by local Councils. They are cross about the fact that they cannot clear specified parts of their land for farming and yet the CSG companies are entitled to do so for the purposes of mining infrastructure and operations. Sadly our government leaders have been so bedazzled by the big dollar signs, that they are blinded to the tragic & permanent consequences of this type of operation.

Even the right to Lock The Gate is being gradually taken from Australian farmers, with Chinese interests in CSG mining making opportunistic purchases and paying millions of dollars for farms so that CSG mining can operate unimpeded. Because of the big bucks they are prepared to pay, they seem certain that they have the nod from the State Government that they can mine with its blessing. I have not heard of any action by State or Federal governments to halt this unfortunate foreign land grab.

In the case of the Liverpool Plains area for example, there is a gradual loss of available fertile soil to mining. There is therefore an urgent need for government to address our food security problems before it is too late. The Hunter Valley is already suffering and plans to mine under Sydney is utterly ridiculous. Presently the Northern Rivers area of NSW is being actively promoted as the food bowl of the north-east sector. Consumers are encouraged by "buy local" because we are near enough to the farms as to be able to ascertain the quality & purity of our food. Because of the huge reserves of underground gas, there is concern that this idyllic situation can be ruined by CSG mining. There is an increasing number of farmers operating under Organic or Biodynamic certification and this could be ruined if a CSG company insists upon conducting mining operations. Even though most of the work is done under the ground, it must be accessed above the ground upon land which it doesn't own.

Just because we have experienced an end to a severe drought in a very dramatic way, we cannot assume that another big drought is just around the corner. Fracking uses a lot of water and there is widespread concern among farmers that, although they will have to see their crops die from lack of rain and available irrigation water, the needs of the CSG miners will take first priority.

Because the National Party has let down the farmers big time, there has been an historic alliance between farmers, environmental groups and the tourist industry. The opportunity to visit a farm as a tourist to sit and enjoy the food & wine produced by the farmer in a picturesque & peaceful environment, is being seriously threatened by CSG mining. At a recent National Party conference, mining magnate Clive Palmer, who was invited to speak on the carbon tax, surprised the audience with his scathing attack on the CSG industry. He expressed his opinion in no uncertain terms that it would poison both people and the environment. He also stated that China abandoned this type of mining about 20 years ago because it was considered dangerous. I hope that the National Party heads his warning.

The mining companies seem to want to bring up coal seam gas, just because it is there, because they have the legal right to, and to hell with the environment and the land-owners. It is encouraging to see that at last the State Government is looking at placing restrictions upon mining licences, but this has only come about as a result of the vociferous voices of the people, not from its own wisdom.

The worrying question is "What redress do we have when pollution, degradation & disruption occurs under the loose restrictions of existing licences?" I hear complaints coming out of SE Qld. that there are not enough government inspectors to adequately monitor for any breaches by miners. Will the NSW government only employ a small number of token inspectors whose stretched itinerary might allow for breaches to occur undetected?

Unfortunately there is little support for the worried public. Richmond Valley council and our local State M.P. have openly supported Metagasco's operations and have turned a deaf ear to the concerns of worried people. Our only political champion - apart from the Greens - is our Federal M.P. who was honest enough to admit to being previously naïve, but nowadays is wiser & better informed. The CEO of Metagasco is buoyed by his salary and profits from his shares. He angered the audience at a recent public meeting by being dismissive of any dissenting opinion, no matter how well-educated or well-informed that opinion happened to be. The audience was furious at his paternalistic "Trust me" response.

Previous vague waffles from some civic leaders regarding the economic benefits of Metagasco's operations have gone quiet because there is no evidence to prove the assertion that gas mining will be "good for the town." Will the company employ large gangs of local people? Probably not. And if the small contingent of out-of-town workers do shop locally, this will hardly cause any upward movement in the present struggling economy. There is also the distinct possibility that the noise created by mining operations will depress property values in the quieter areas of Casino. Will Metagasco's operations bring about an increase in the police force or the availability of doctors? I very much doubt it. Many of us ask "Will CSG mining assist in our daily struggle to make ends meet?" Not unless we own Metagasco shares.

I am not a scientist. But I detect a vast gap between the opinions of eminent scientists and the spin of CSG companies. I feel encouraged to see that at last State and Federal governments are now exploring this gap. A pity they didn't do this years ago, before licenses were issued to CSG miners.