

**Submission  
No 151**

## **INQUIRY INTO COAL SEAM GAS**

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## SUBMISSION: NSW Upper House Inquiry into Coal Seam Gas Mining

We wish to express our concern regarding the headlong rush into Coal Seam Gas Mining in NSW. We believe that the risk of destruction to the environment and the threat to the health and lifestyle of the community for countless generations is not worth the short term profit to be made from this venture. Moreover, there are other options for the supply of safe renewable energy.

CSGM poses a real threat to our water supply on a number of levels. For example, potential contamination of groundwater aquifers by leakage of toxic chemicals; pollution of surface water systems from 'waste' water; the use of large volumes of water for drilling and fracking taken from already depleted systems, such as the Murray-Darling; the location of CSG wells in sensitive floodplains and in water catchments.

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CSGM poses a real threat to native bushland. Currently CSGM can occur in areas bordering National Parks and is permitted in State Conservation Areas and State Forests. The extensive clearing of vegetation required to construct and operate gas wells, including infrastructure such as access roads and pipelines, results in a loss of habitat for already struggling wildlife. The loss of trees contributes to the greenhouse effect. It turns major remnant vegetation into industrial wasteland and reduces leisure opportunities for people.

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Evidence of environmental damage from CSGM can already be found in the Pilliga where Eastern Star Gas has discharged 'waste' water into a creek. A spillage of 'waste' water has led to extensive tree deaths, native animal deaths have been found at drill ponds, and methane gas has been found leaking from gas pipelines and a water drain. This is only the beginning. It is planned that CSGM will clear at least 2,400 hectares and fragment 85,000 hectares of public land.

CSGM poses a real threat to our food security. Agriculture is not compatible with CSGM as many a Queensland farmer has found out too late. After allowing mining companies on their land in good faith, they find that the project was misrepresented and their farms are now no longer viable. This is due to fragmentation of their property by infrastructure, pollution from leakage of toxic chemicals, drastic reduction in the water table and the migration of methane into water supply to name but a few reasons. It is frightening to think that the Liverpool Plains, Northern Rivers region and the broad acres around Moree could suffer the same fate. Our agricultural land is too precious to be lost.

CSGM poses a real threat to human health and well-being. Water is our most valuable resource, it is our greatest need next to air we breathe. There is a danger that water used for human or agricultural production could be contaminated by the toxic chemicals used in fracking and drilling as well as those present in the coal seam. A threat also arises from the leakage of methane and other gases during production and transport. Well-being is threatened when communities are excluded from the planning process and public participation in decision making is denied. The first most knew that a mining lease had been issued on their land was when a mining company came knocking on their door. Landholders face the prospect of losing control of their land. Property values are degraded once licences are issued.

CSGM is not a renewable resource, nor is it needed to supply the energy needs of NSW or Australia. CSG is a fossil fuel and it generates in excess of 40 times the amount of greenhouse gas per unit of energy than solar or wind. Thus it significantly contributes to global warming. We should be looking to other options for safe renewable energy. Beyond Zero Emissions Inc., a not for profit volunteer run organisation, in partnership with the University of Melbourne Energy Research Institute, is putting together a fully costed transition plan for getting Australia to have zero emissions in ten years using commercially available technology. Nor is it a good return for the

taxpayers of NSW. Mining companies pay only 10% of their return to the government. Much of the remaining 90% goes offshore to foreign owners.

Currently there is no effective legislation to control the management of CSGM. *We call for* a moratorium on ALL forms of coal seam gas drilling until environmental, social and health impacts have been rigorously and independently assessed and procedures are in place to enforce recommendations. Coal seam gas exploration and mining must be made subject to all relevant environmental legislation, including the native vegetation and water management laws. Penalty for non-compliance must be severe and not limited to a measly few thousand dollars fine. It needs to be more like shutting down the operation.

In addition, *we call for* a prohibition on coal seam gas exploration and mining in important bushland, valuable farmland, groundwater aquifers, residential areas and public lands. *We call for* a requirement that all chemicals used in coal seam gas drilling or fracking be assessed by the chemical regulator for use for that purpose before being used. *We call for* the provision of standing to ensue that the community has full legal rights to challenge and enforce environmental laws under which coal seam gas companies are operating. *We call for* the provision of a right in the Petroleum (Onshore) Act to allow landholders to refuse consent for coal seam gas exploration on their land.

Heather and Max Barnard

2<sup>nd</sup> September 2011