

**Submission
No 877**

INQUIRY INTO COAL SEAM GAS

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Inquiry into Coal Seam Gas.

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Addressing the points of the brief:

1. The environmental and health impact of CSG activities including the:

- a. Effect on ground and surface water systems,**
- b. Effects related to the use of chemicals,**
- c. Effects related to hydraulic fracturing,**
- e. Nature and effectiveness of remediation required under the Act,**

These are clearly all negative.

The ideal from the miner's perspective is to drill bores closely enough together to be able to fracture the entire coal seam deposit and extract the maximum amount of gas. This means pumping in enough poisons to make a complete sheet of poisoned coal seam over the whole area.

The fracking fluids are not being pumped into a sealed box. Rocks naturally have porosity and cracks. No amount of testing can detect all possible weak points. Also, fracking deliberately breaks up the geological strata and the drilling punches holes going right to the surface. There is no way anyone can guarantee that anything can be contained in the process of CSG extraction, even with the best testing and intentions. There will be poisoning of aquifers. Once the poisons are pumped into the ground there is no way of "remedying" the damage. There is no way to vacuum them up. There is no way to re-establish the original aquifer structure. No amount of effort or compensation is enough.

The produced water pits are another big concern, with untreatable poisons being left lying on the surface because there is no way ever to dispose of the combination of regurgitated poisonous fracking fluids, coal seam poisons and salt. It also becomes airborne pollution and can leach into ground water.

Coal seam gas mining must not proceed until it can be done without pumping poisons into the ground. The mining companies must also have specific and adequate processes in place for progressive safe treatment of the produced water – that it is dealt with, not just left behind.

d. Effect on Crown Lands including travelling stock routes and State forests,

The public are not allowed to walk in water catchment areas to protect drinking water. Coal seam gas exploration and mining must surely also be excluded from these areas – for both the large trucks and mining machinery used and for the damage to aquifers.

f. Effect on greenhouse gas and other emissions,

g. Relative air quality and environmental impacts compared to alternative fossil fuels.

Methane may burn more cleanly than other fossil fuels but the benefit is countered by the leakage of unburned methane at the wells and through the ground nearby.

2. The economic and social implications of CSG activities including those which affect:

- a. Legal rights of property owners and property values,**
- b. Food security and agricultural activity,**

What use is money if there is no food to eat?

Large areas of agricultural land are disappearing under the web of roads, wells and pipes. It is not justice that property owners have no legal standing to defend their valid, legal use of the land against an aggressive and financially powerful mining industry.

This is another case of the rich becoming richer and the poor becoming more dispossessed and more numerous.

c. Regional development, investment and employment, and State competitiveness,

Regions such as the Hunter that have worked hard to develop agriculture, vineyards and tourism are having their livelihoods destroyed by uncontrollable external forces.

d. Royalties payable to the State,

The royalties may be useful now but be sure to take a long-term view.

e. Local Government including provision of local/regional infrastructure and local planning control mechanisms.

3. The role of CSG in meeting the future energy needs of NSW including the:

- a. Nature and extent of CSG demand and supply,**
- b. Relative whole-of-lifecycle emission intensity of CSG versus other energy sources,**
- c. Dependence of industry on CSG for non-energy needs (eg. chemical manufacture),**

Burning CSG just because we can is very short sighted. Leaving some in the ground for future uses (maybe some not yet invented) would surely be a good idea.

d. Installed and availability costs of CSG versus other stationary energy sources,

e. Proportion of NSW energy needs which should be base load or peaking supply and the extent to which CSG is needed for that purpose,

A solar electricity plant in Spain now produces power 24 hours per day using molten salt heat storage for a 15 hour heat bank. The technology already exists to move entirely to renewable energy sources, at similar costs to fossil fuels. CSG is not needed but is just easier for corporations that are already oriented in that direction.

f. Contribution of CSG to energy security and as a transport fuel.

As a small part of the energy mix CSG may have a place. However, it is still a fossil fuel that contributes to global warming and it will still be used up. 181 years (as mentioned in the standing committee press release) may seem a long time but it is less than the time since federation.

The generation of methane gas through renewable means should also be pursued, such as from landfill, sewerage and other biomass. The rate of production would not be as great as csg but would be more sustainable in terms of ongoing use.

4. The interaction of the Act with other legislation and regulations, including the Land

Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991.

5. The impact similar industries have had in other jurisdictions.

Numerous documentaries and news pieces have shown that in the USA, Canada and Queensland wherever coal seam gas has developed the land has gone from productive agricultural land or ecologically flourishing landscapes to industrial barrenness.

And now an impassioned plea:

How we think of mining and its treatment in law must change.

Currently mining is an economic silver bullet that has a status of unquestioned imperative over all other stakeholders. At the start of the industrial revolution the world was seen as an infinite resource – now we know we have treated earth like a planet under liquidation. Every available resource is gutted at the cheapest cost in a relentless feeding frenzy to feed corporate profits and appease the

god of economic growth . . . as if we are mining a bottomless pit . . . as if growth can continue infinitely in a finite world.

Now we must change.

The earth is being squeezed dry of anything thought of value. The surface is denuded as though the life it sustains is worthless. What are we going to hand on to future generations? In the 250 years of the industrial era we have shared out most of anything that seemed useful. That is less than 10 generations. What share will we leave the thousands of generations to come?

Agricultural land is essential for food. Most cities have been located where abundant fresh water was available. We are in the ludicrous situation of spending resources to dabble with genetically modified crops trying to make more food while we denude and poison our best farmland with mining. And we have poisons being pumped into the ground for fracking next to Sydney's main water supply.

Expectations must change.

There can be no perpetual growth. There is a limit to the population that can be sustained. There is a limit to how much stuff a person can accumulate. There is a limit to how much can be dug out of the ground. There can not be perpetual economic growth. A living, sustainable balance must be found.

The laws must change.

Truly independent oversight of the mining industry is required. Economic imperative is not enough justification. There must be no mining unless the mining companies can prove beyond reasonable doubt that it will not degrade the existing uses of the land and will not impair rights of the future generations to the land.

The landholders must have a right to veto mining on their land.

Who knows? We might even be able to save something for the future after all.

If we don't, the flame of human existence may glow very brightly – but it will be very brief.

