

**Submission
No 439**

INQUIRY INTO COAL SEAM GAS

Organisation: Ecological Agriculture Australia Association
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Ecological Agriculture Australia Association

For the advancement of soil, farming, food & community

Ecological Agriculture Australia Association [EAAA] is a diverse community of people and organizations who share the belief that the world urgently needs to develop bio diverse landscapes, biologically enriched soil, healthy food, and vibrant communities through ecologically, holistic and ethically processes.



The issue of coal seam gas has now risen to National prominence with more than 2/3rds of Australians or 68% supporting a moratorium on coal seam gas mining until more is known about its environmental impacts. Around 70% support a ban on coal seam gas mining in cities and towns, a view shared by resident in both city and regional areas. The Galaxy pole was jointly commissioned by the Australian Greens and the NSW Greens MP Jeremy Buckingham, and was conducted over 3 days.

We submit that the activities of the coal seam gas industry must be ceased until the nations resources can be properly safeguarded

The Ecological Agriculture Association of Australia submits the following points to the Coal Seam Gas inquiry for appraisal.

[1] The coal seam gas industry has not been proven to be a safe and reliable industry. Indeed there is a mounting array of evidence that suggests otherwise.

[a] A Queensland court has shut down an experimental underground coal gasification project by Cougar Energy on the Darling Downs after dangerous chemicals were found in underground water supplies. Carcinogenic chemicals were found in bore water. Carcinogenic chemicals have been detected in 5 water bores around the Queensland town of Dalby.

[b] The proposal to use the controversial 'fracking' technique to mine directly beside Warragamba dam, which holds most of Sydney's drinking water. Fracking involves potentially toxic chemicals and the contamination of aquifers. Moreover there are disposal issues regarding big volumes of saline water pumped back into the surface.

[c] The film Gasland depicts the destructiveness to the environment and associated health issues re the coal seam gas industry. In American communities where coal seam fracking has occurred water supplies have been contaminated, and drinking water has had to be trucked in to supply households. The chemicals used in the fracking process have proven to be carcinogenic and injurious to health.

United States studies have shown that the chemicals used during fracking can contaminate ground water. The United States Environmental Protection Agency is due to hand down a full report in 2012.

[d] There is growing concern and mounting evidence about damage done to aquifers which cannot be repaired. Mr Dunn, a spokesperson for Australian Petroleum Producers and Explorations Association, told a meeting in Sydney that damage to aquifers was inevitable and unavoidable. In this driest of continents aquifers are our lifeblood. Anything that threatens water security must be banned.

[e] Methane is known to be many times more potent than carbon dioxide as a green house gas. Wherever fracking has been practised methane has been found to escape into the atmosphere. In addition the leaking of methane gas from wells is highly explosive and dangerous. There are many documented instances of methane leaking out of people's taps. Over 50% of wells tested in Queensland leak methane. CSM wells do sometimes catch fire and explode. CSM wells and pipelines are fire hazards.

[2] Damage to Water Tables and Aquifers.

[a] Coal seam gas mining has been shown to compromise the safety of our drinking water. Huge volumes extracted from the coal seam can lead to a major depletion of connected aquifers. This depletion affects drinking water, agriculture, horticulture, and the ability to produce clean green food for our communities.

The integrity and preservation of our aquifers goes beyond the realm of individual states. It is a matter of national importance. The Commonwealth of Australia needs by legislation to become actively involved here. This raises questions of national security involving the safety of our water supply, and our capacity to feed ourselves from our prime agricultural land. The Great Artesian basin is a national resource and part of a wider ecological system. It is a resource of National importance and lies under 22% of Australia. It is the only reliable source of water in semi-arid areas.

The coal seam gas mining proposed for the Liverpool Plains, Hunter Valley, St Peters, Warragamba Dam catchment, Southern Highlands and other parts of the State will cause considerable environmental damage, pollution of aquifers and loss of prime agricultural land.

The damage to aquifers, agricultural land, and the contamination and depletion of the Great Artesian Basin will be an ecological disaster, which will affect generations to come. The extraction of coal seam gas is an environmental calamity. To contemplate fracking around Warragamba Dam the water supply for the city of Sydney, is environmental vandalism beyond description.

The development of the coal seam gas industry in Australia has been done by stealth, and a national resource has been traded without the awareness of the communities involved, all for self serving interest without regard to the constituencies they were meant to be representing.

The State Government should extend the moratorium on fracking to coal seam gas extraction indefinitely until it can be proven that this industry is safe and does not destroy our National resources. There needs to be legislation enacted making damage to aquifers an offence to anyone causing or facilitating such damage. That includes politicians. At present there are no effective regulations in place regarding this industry which has the capacity to destroy the non-renewable resources of Australia.

The preservation of our aquifers is a matter of national importance as is the issue of food production and security. We call on the States & the Commonwealth of Australia to enact legislation that protects our aquifers and our prime agricultural land.

Australia, it's still worth fighting for.

The precautionary principle – This principle means that where there may be a threat of serious or irreversible harm, that a lack of full scientific certainty will not be used to prevent governments from taking appropriate cost-effective precautionary action. The United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, the international regulatory system for multilateral environmental agreements and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety are based on the precautionary principle. The precautionary principle recognizes the responsibilities of governments to protect the rights of people from harm by scientific technology and their products.

1. It is a basic human right to live in a pollution free world. [United Nations Human Rights Committee 2001].
2. Australia is a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child which sets out a child's right to health, food and clean water taking into consideration the dangers and risks of environmental pollution.

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