Submission No 746

INQUIRY INTO COAL SEAM GAS

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INQUIRY INTO COAL SEAM GAS EXTRACTION IN NSW

Submission from Pru Wawn, Visual Arts secondary teacher,
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The coal seam gas (CSG) industry has neither been proven safe nor has it a social license to operate in communities. Experience in Queensland and the USA reveals that coal seam gas presents a significant risk to water supplies and is damaging agricultural and environmentally sensitive lands.

Australian farmers just can't compete with the millions of dollars available to the big mining companies. The fact that the mining industry in Australia is 83% foreign owned makes it imperative for the NSW government to put our communities ahead of the profits of multinational mining corporations and protect the long-term future of NSW.

The mining boom is bringing prosperity to some people, however it's at the expense of many in regional and rural NSW and is squeezing out other, more sustainable industries. It is essential that we carefully plan how to most effectively reduce CO2 pollution without being blinded by greed and instant "solutions".

I share the widespread opposition to CSG due to the following impacts:

Fracking - banned in France and either suspended or under review in many countries because of the damage to aquifers.

Surface Infrastructure - disrupting agriculture and visually intrusive - includes pipelines, roads, compressor stations, export terminals and processing facilities. The quality of life for many people living in the most beautiful rural environments will be severely impaired if not destroyed by ugly, smelly, polluting structures located in their immediate vicinity.

Water Quality - a number of naturally occurring toxic chemicals are released from within the coal seam and dispersed into the groundwater. Large holding pools of waste saline water with no means of disposal are also created in the process.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions - very little advantage if any over coal fired power especially when considering the contribution of escaping fugitive emissions such as methane (20 times more potent than CO2)

Food Security – the world's growing population raises the value of Australia's most productive agricultural land – there are no alternatives for food!

I strongly believe it is essential that a moratorium be established on new coal seam gas exploration and production across NSW for 12 months, in order to establish it's safety and other impacts on the environment.

I would also consider it wise for the NSW government to prohibit CSG development within the Sydney Metropolitan Area and the Special Catchment Areas that protect our drinking water supplies.

Like many, I am very concerned about the state in which we leave this planet for future generations and therefore appreciate the opportunity this inquiry provides to reconsider the value of the CSG industry and it's harmful impacts.

Yours sincerely,
Prudence Wawn

Royalties- under the current arrangements no royalties will be paid for the first five years, which is usually the most productive period of a mine's operation. It is incomprehensible that all this social dislocation and community frustration is being allowed to occur for so little financial return.

The Impact of CSG Expansion on Renewable Energy Investment

The most disturbing aspect of this short-sighted frenzy to exploit every possible earner for overseas shareholders is the likelihood that investment in clean energy will be diverted into CSG with all its extensive infrastructure.

While 6% of Sydney's domestic gas is supplied by coal seam gas from AGL Camden Gas field, the bulk of projects currently being developed in Australia and NSW are targeted to the export market. Options include export from a Liquefied Natural Gas plant at Newcastle as being proposed by Eastern Star Gas. Metgasco in Queensland are proposing an offshore processing and export facility off the coast of Ballina and a pipeline to Queensland would see the major deposits currently under exploration in the Gunnedah Basin and north to the Queensland border transported to Gladstone in Queensland where four major export terminals are planned.

Such enormous investment in expensive infrastructure will ensure their continued use. Australia will then be locked into contributing in a negative way to the carbon footprint of other countries, rather than assisting in the take up of cleaner energy options that will become increasingly competitive and available.

There is a debatable argument made by government and industry that coal seam gas is a cleaner burning fuel and should be used as a transition to renewable energy. The fact that the greenhouse gas emissions profile for CSG is subject to significant uncertainty undermines this argument. While there is such a strong focus on export and no discussion by the industry about retiring coal power stations, it's clear that only the establishment of an actual timeline for closing down coal-fired power stations will give this idea of CSG as an interim solution any credibility.

Renewable technologies have matured to the point that there is no need for a transition fuel to fill any gap in energy demands. NSW currently has over 2,200 MW of wind energy installed, approved or proposed. Recently in Spain a solar thermal power station with molten salt storage was commissioned demonstrating the ability for 24hour electricity from solar power. New energy technologies will provide more employment and assist in balancing the "two speed economy" by creating diversity and reducing Australia's dependence on the mining sector.

Beyond Zero Emission have provided a roadmap for Australia to move rapidly to zero emission energy generation within a decade with a focus on solar thermal, wind and biomass power generation. This could be done within a time frame as to not require a gas transition fuel.