

Submission
No 546

INQUIRY INTO COAL SEAM GAS

Name: Name Suppressed

Date received: 7/09/2011

Partially Confidential

I would like to make a submission regarding Coal Seam Gas exploration and mining.

I live in _____ near to the Pilliga forest, where CSG exploration has been carried out and it is proposed that a huge gas field be established. The Pilliga is a high conservation value bushland that should be protected.

However, this is much more than a local issue as about 25% of NSW is currently covered by CSG exploration licenses. It is an industry with potential large environmental and social impacts. CSG mining needs to be heavily regulated and subject to strict environmental guidelines, if allowed at all. Given the areas of possible harm from CSG, it would be preferable if the Government did not allow CSG mining anywhere in NSW.

Water Impacts

One of the huge issues with CSG mining is the threat to our underground water supplies. CSG wells bore through overlying aquifers such as the Great Artesian Basin to reach gas seams. The possible disruption of these aquifers and the risk of all water becoming contaminated by chemicals released in the mining process is a huge threat. This type of contamination has already been seen in Queensland near Dalby with carcinogenic chemicals detected in 5 bores. The CSG mining companies say they cannot guarantee that this will not happen so how can CSG mining even be considered, given this very real possibility.

Peter Fox, a representative of Eastern Star Gas, at a public meeting at Tambar Springs on Wed 27th July, stated that his company could not guarantee a 100% risk free operation on the Great Artesian Basin. One real risk is the inevitable breakdown of metal casings and concrete in a highly toxic, saline environment. Accidental contamination due to the unknowns involved in fracturing large areas of underground seams also just cannot be dismissed. We can't drink coal seam gas. We need to preserve and protect our absolutely vital water supplies. Many rural communities and agricultural livelihoods would be severely impacted if underground water supplies were affected by CSG mining.

CSG mining also uses large amounts of water. Given the scale of operations proposed, the amount of water required is not sustainable and would compound water shortages in many areas.

Also disposing of the large volumes of released water is a problem. This water is potentially very saline and toxic unless treated properly. Here in the Pilliga, there are areas where damage from the salinity is very apparent.

Social and Health Impacts

There are many other issues around CSG mining. Some of these include a threat to our food security because of water and surface impacts and the largely increased risk of fire (especially in the Pilliga Forest where wildfires are already a problem).

The environmental impacts created will also be substantial as large scale clearing is undertaken and infrastructure is built. The possible adverse health effects of the toxic chemicals involved in, and released by, CSG mining also need to be considered.

CSG mining is not clean and green as only a 3% methane leakage, a very common occurrence, cancels any green house gas emissions advantage claimed for CSG over coal.

Short term economic considerations should not take precedent over issues such as water and food security. Governments should be actively encouraging renewable energy sources instead of questionable CSG.

Given these concerns, I would ask that there be:

A full moratorium on all forms of coal seam gas drilling until the environmental, social and health impacts have been rigorously and independently assessed.

That Coal seam gas exploration and mining be made subject to all relevant environmental legislation, including the native vegetation and water management laws.

Standing provided to ensure that the community has full legal rights to challenge and enforce environmental laws under which coal seam gas companies are operating.

The provision of a right in the Petroleum (Onshore) Act to allow landholders to refuse consent for coal seam gas exploration or production on their land.

A prohibition on coal seam gas exploration and mining in important bushland, valuable farmland, groundwater aquifers, residential areas and public lands.

A requirement that all chemicals used in coal seam gas drilling or fracking must be assessed by the chemical regulator for use for that purpose before being approved for use.

Yours faithfully