

INQUIRY INTO COAL SEAM GAS

Name: Name suppressed

Date received: 8/09/2011

Partially Confidential

COAL SEAM GAS MINING: SUBMISSION TO NSW PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE

I wish to express strong concerns about coal seam gas mining. My concerns can be summarised under 2 categories, namely:

1. Environmental and Health grounds, and
2. Economic and Social effects.

1. Environmental and Health concerns

The injection of a mixture of sand, water and multiple unknown chemicals into coal seams at high pressure in order to fracture the rock poses unacceptable risks.

- Environmental risks include the release of both natural and man-made chemicals including toluene, xylene and heavy metals, carcinogens, and huge quantities of underground salt. Water pumped from the coal seams is highly polluted, and the coal seam gas industry is not able to remove all the chemicals from the ground, or to prevent their entry into waterways or underground aquifers.
- In addition to this, there is the question of how this toxic water pumped from the gas wells is to be safely disposed of.
- This raises the very real possibility of large-scale contamination of water supplies, in a period of global warming, on the driest continent on Earth. This would be an unconscionable legacy for future generations, and may well impact on the current generation of Australians.
- Other environmental concerns include the destruction of vegetation and habitat for humans and animals to make way for the various access roads, pipelines, wells, pumping stations, workers' camps, machinery storage and other infrastructure associated with coal seam gas mining.
- Along with the structures on and in the ground there are issues of noise and lights 24 hours per day, gas leaking from wells, flaring of the methane gas, and loss and or contamination of productive land.
- The process of fracturing coal seams and then removing both fluids and gas must create changes in rock layers and new and unpredictable pathways for gas and

water. There have been reports of subsidence and even earthquakes have been linked to the “fracking” process.

- There have been numerous reports of health problems among people living in coal seam gas fields, both in Australia and overseas. Representatives of the mining companies claim that the chemicals used are found in many manufactured household products. This hardly assures residents of their safety when the exact chemicals are a closely guarded secret, and there is no evidence that their safety in combination has been established. In addition, it would seem impossible to determine the actual level of exposure of people living in gas fields, given the many variables involved, and the fact that it is impossible to keep chemicals from entering the air, soil and water.
- The issues listed above indicate the relative impacts of coal seam gas mining on air quality and the environment generally are extreme, and largely irreversible. Coal seam gas cannot be considered a greenhouse friendly fuel when these costs of extraction are taken into account.

2. Economic and Social Effects

Coal seam gas mining has detrimental effects on land and its future usefulness, property values, local businesses, individuals’ lives and livelihoods, and on communities where it is established.

- Land is significantly degraded and polluted, and agricultural land is often rendered unproductive and unlivable. This in combination with contamination of water supplies stands to destroy valuable food producing land in NSW (as appears to be happening in Queensland), and this threatens our food security.
- Property values plummet in areas where coal seam gas mining is commenced, and landholders are not compensated for this and are unable to start their lives again elsewhere. Buyers do not want to live on gas fields, and coal seam gas companies do not buy properties as they have no need to do so.
- Local businesses can be very badly affected by coal seam gas activities. As real estate loses value and the environment deteriorates, industries such as tourism and fisheries suffer.
- Landholders suffer enormous stress in addition to financial and health impacts from coal seam gas mining. Their very limited rights to veto coal seam gas mining on their property and the lack of compensation are destructive to individual lives and families and to whole communities.

- Employment created in mining is at the expense of employment in agriculture and tourism/hospitality, and often at the expense of the lifestyle and health of people living in the mining area.

CONCLUSION

A number of serious concerns about coal seam gas mining have been outlined, including environmental, health, economic and community issues.

I wish to urge a cessation of all coal seam gas mining in NSW, in order to protect and preserve our health and environment.

Yours Sincerely