

**Submission
No 99**

INQUIRY INTO COAL SEAM GAS

Name: Mrs Indra Stephenson

Date received: 31/08/2011

RECEIVED
31 AUG 2011
LEGISLATIVE
COUNCIL

99
Mrs. Indra Stephenson

23rd August, 2011

To the General Purpose Standing Committee No.5,

The UN general assembly last year declared that:

“Safe and clean drinking water and sanitation is a human right essential to the full enjoyment of life and all other human rights”. (UN News Centre)

With this declaration, the UN has acknowledged that clean water is of central importance to wellbeing and absolutely vital to life. Many farmers, urban & rural communities and other opponents of coal seam gas mining believe that CSG exploration and expansion threatens Australian people's access to this fundamental human right. The National Water Commission has stated its concern (Is Coal Seam Gas worth the Risk? - smh.com.au 20/8/2011). Even the major investment bank JP Morgan says “the industry has significant water risks, an unknown impact from growth and is a potential risk to public safety” (Coal seam gas a risk: JPMorgan - smh.com.au 15/12/2010).

Water is the basis of our agricultural independence. It seems perfectly likely, based on the catastrophic results of CSG mining in the USA, QLD and elsewhere, that CSG expansion in NSW will compromise underground water purity, placing our future water security at risk. It is common knowledge that the hydraulic fracking fluids used by many CSG mining companies are already proven to be harmful to humans, animals and the environment. However, the extent of toxicity is not yet known. Many toxic spills have already occurred. My understanding is that the CSG industry is currently under no obligation to treat the massive volumes of groundwater that are contaminated and brought to the surface. Much anecdotal evidence suggests that it is common practice for contaminated water to be sprayed onto roadsides or dumped into old mining shafts. This situation begs for an independent enquiry, for the sake of our continued independence as an agriculturally self-sufficient society.

Clearly we need an extended moratorium on CSG mining exploration and drilling until we can be guided by evidence in this major decision. Independent studies need to be carried out to answer the questions on so many lips: Can coal seam gas be safely extracted without causing irreparable environmental damage? How does CSG mining impact on aquifers, water quality and agricultural capability? This industry should be subject to the same level of scrutiny and testing that the pharmaceutical industry is when scientists release a new medicine for human consumption. Both industries impact significantly on quality of human life. There is as much, if not more at stake if we do not apply strict, independent guidelines to discover whether the CSG industry is safe for our aquifers and food security.

The economic appeal of CSG mining needs to be a secondary consideration to the sanctity of our water and food supply. If independent research proves that extraction of coal seam gas causes gross degradation of water and agricultural resources, impacting negatively on the health and wellbeing of Australian people, then we need to ban CSG expansion without further ado. We can not continue to favour mining interests over other economic factors, such as tourism and agriculture. Landowners and caretakers protect many environmentally sensitive areas and contribute much to the agricultural wealth of this land. They should therefore have the right to negotiate with, or refuse access to mining industry bodies wishing to explore CSG opportunities. We can not continue to justify growth at any cost, particularly when viable alternatives exist.

Gas mining is not a clean, green alternative to coal. It can not be treated as a transitional fuel while we phase out our reliance on coal. It presents a real threat to the environment, livelihood, health and quality of life and therefore can not be considered alongside solar, wind and geothermal technology as part of an authentic alternate energy revolution in Australia. It is particularly inappropriate in areas where agriculture and/or tourism are major economic contributors, such as the Northern Rivers and the Hunter Valley.

Many politicians from across the board have recently expressed doubts about the wisdom of CSG expansion, from Tony Abbott to Tony Windsor, to Barnaby Joyce, to Anna Bligh, to Jeremy Buckingham. Environmental and health professionals are similarly united by their apprehension. This is an issue that has attracted widespread public

concern. 91% of respondents to a popular poll are agreed that Coal Seam Gas is NOT worth the risk (Is Coal Seam Gas worth the Risk? SMH.com.au 20/8/2011). At the time of writing almost 40,000 people have signed GetUp's petition demanding tighter regulation of the CSG industry. Hundreds of community groups are united in opposing the unplanned and unregulated expansion of CSG mining. The prominence of groups like the Lock The Gate Alliance is evidence that CSG mining does not have general public support. The CSG industry can not, therefore, be granted a social licence to operate in NSW unless extensive research proves beyond a doubt that there are no substantial risks involved.

Yours sincerely,

Indra Stephenson