

**Submission
No 582**

INQUIRY INTO COAL SEAM GAS

Organisation: Willoughby City Council
Name: Mr Nick Tobin
Position: General Manager
Date received: 7/09/2011

RECEIVED

- 7 SEP 2011

LEGISLATIVE
COUNCIL

The Office of the General Manager

2 September 2011

The Director
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5
Parliament House
Macquarie St
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Fax: (02) 9230 2981

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Submission Regarding Coal Seam Gas Exploration and Mining

Willoughby City Council (WCC) commends the NSW Government for instigating the Legislative Council Inquiry into Coal Seam Gas mining and is pleased to make the following submission.

WCC is extremely concerned about Coal Seam Gas activities in urban areas and the impacts that this will have on businesses, residents' health and the health of our environment.

Willoughby is a medium sized local government area occupying 23 square kilometres on the lower North Shore of Sydney, 8.5kms north of the Sydney Central Business District (CBD). Willoughby has a population of about 68 000 people in an estimated 28 000 households.

WCC is committed to striving towards sustainability, by providing leadership and working with the community. The City's scenic waterways, bushland reserves, parks, playgrounds, stunning bush walks, combined art and environmental projects, green corridors and significant heritage items provide an inspiring and healthy environment for its communities and visitors.

The Council has adopted a Charter for Sustainability. Principle 11 of the Charter notes that:

We adopt the precautionary principle, so that those proposing development will need to show that their actions are without significant harm to the environment, rather than the community needing to demonstrate absolute proof of cause.

Coal Seam Gas (CSG) extraction is becoming one of Australia's fastest growing petroleum industries. It is understood that whilst electricity produced by gas has lower carbon emissions than coal fired power, the inadvertent release of coal seam methane during the fracking process produces extremely high levels of greenhouse gases, as methane is more than 20 times more potent than carbon as a greenhouse gas. Council

is concerned that the emergence and expansion of this industry without an effective means of controlling methane by-products is unsustainable and contrary to the Government's policies on reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Dart Energy has secured a Petroleum Exploration Licence (PEL 463) that covers 2385km² which is most of the Sydney basin, including the Willoughby LGA. The licence currently allows Dart Energy to drill an exploration well at St Peters in the Leichhardt LGA, however once gas is found, further exploration and fracking wells could be developed across Sydney in established and planned future residential areas. This is likely to have a significant and unacceptable impact on the amenity of established areas and would delay the necessary release of new urban areas to meet the State's housing supply crisis.

Willoughby City Council is concerned not only about the potential direct adverse impacts of mining (fracking) activities in an urban area, but also the minimal amount of information that is currently being given by mining companies about their activities, the footprint of operations, chemicals that are used, storage facilities required, greenhouse gas emissions and other air emissions, water consumption and wastewater disposal; and potential noise impacts to name a few areas of uncertainty. This lack of information and uncertainty undermines the community confidence in the safety and environmental health aspects of the activity.

Human health impacts are also of major concern. A submission to the Senate on the "Impact of Coal Seam Gas mining in the Murray Darling Basin" from Doctors for the Environment Australia (Contributors included Professor Peter Doherty - Nobel Laureate for Physiology or Medicine) noted that:

Coal seam gas mining may have adverse impacts on human health by contamination of drinking and agricultural-use water, and air. Contaminants of concern include many of the chemicals used for fracking, as well as toxic substances produced through this process and mobilised from the sedimentary regions drilled. Some of these compounds can produce short-term health effects and some may contribute to systemic illness and/or cancer many years later.
(Doctors for the Environment Australia June 2011).

In addition, the submission also states that:

There is a significant threat of ground water pollution, for the hydrological systems involved are complex and inadequately researched. (Doctors for the Environment Australia June 2011).

As the current Dart energy exploration licence covers the Sydney Basin, we believe there is also high potential for contamination of Sydney's drinking water supply. If other exploration licenses are granted then this risk is compounded.

Council is concerned that there has been inadequate research by independent experts to identify potential impacts on aquifers associated with coal seam gas mining and to recommend appropriate measures to minimise any impact on ground water. This is an issue not only for the Sydney basin but across the State where the safeguarding of water supplies is paramount for agriculture and the survival of regional centres.

issue not only for the Sydney basin but across the State where the safeguarding of water supplies is paramount for agriculture food security and the survival of regional centres.

Council also requests that the Inquiry give consideration to the introduction of legislation necessary to ensure that adequate remedial work is undertaken by a proponent once exploratory work and mining has been completed. Such legislation should ensure that the State or communities are not left to clean up after the work is concluded and that a proponent factors in the cost of remediation when they prepare their financial models for a project.

The unknown cumulative impacts of Coal Seam Gas mining on human health and the environment, not only in the Sydney region, is foreboding.

Council therefore urges the NSW Government to also adopt the precautionary principle and maintain the moratorium on coal seam gas exploration in Sydney well into the future and until all environmental and health impacts are rigorously assessed by independent scientists and medical professionals. The moratorium should comprise all aspects of coal seam methane mining including:

- no issuing of exploration licences,
- no approval for assessment leases nor production leases; and
- rescinding any existing exploration licences.

Furthermore, as the current Dart Energy PEL covers the highly populated Sydney Basin, the NSW Government must ensure that relevant Councils and communities are fully consulted not only in relation to the licensing of any further exploration wells but more importantly before any fracking operations commence in these highly urbanised areas.

If the Inquiry finds that the Coal Seam Gas mining should proceed contrary to the concerns raised in this submission then the issue of any license for exploration or mining should only proceed on the basis that the proponent is able to demonstrate that they have the expertise and experience to apply world's best practice in their processes. This will require a rigorous and evidence based methodology for assessing and determining any license applications.

The residents of Willoughby City, and the entire Sydney region, deserve the protection of their environment and right to quiet and safe enjoyment of their homes and neighbourhoods. We trust that this Inquiry will ensure that this is maintained into the future and without the impacts of Coal Seam Gas mining activities.

Yours faithfully

Nick Tobin
GENERAL MANAGER