

**INQUIRY INTO PERFORMANCE OF THE NSW
ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION AUTHORITY**

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EPA INVESTIGATION INTO GROUND WATER CONTAMINATION IN THE PILLIGA BY SANTOS' COAL SEAM GAS EXPLORATION

Documents obtained by The Wilderness Society revealed that that groundwater in the Pilliga has been contaminated by Santos CSG operations. An EPA press release revealed a "spill" which included "salts and other elements" but failed to mention that those other elements included such cancer-causing nasties as uranium, arsenic, lead, barium, boron, aluminium and nickel all in unsafe concentrations.

Eventually, the NSW EPA confirmed the contamination event, but failed to act with any proper legal force, choosing to fine Santos only \$1,500 dollars.

Concerns arising from the incident

Documents obtained by The Wilderness Society suggest that:

The EPA ignored its own internal advice to go public on the leaking coal seam gas ponds in the Pilliga so they could be seen to be active and on the front foot. Instead, they followed Office of Coal Seam Gas (OCSG) advice stating it didn't want to single Santos out, and therefore instead decided to keep the NSW public in the dark.

The EPA did not pass on critical information and documents regarding the contamination to the NSW Department of Health, instead asking Santos for permission to share the information, which was not granted.

The EPA allowed Santos to run the investigation into their leaking ponds. Had the EPA have taken the lead and got the documents, they would have seen that Santos had already had confirmed in independent reports that their ponds were leaking into the surrounding soil. Instead of taking the reins, the EPA ran a vague 'investigation' in relation to a 'suspected leak', losing months before knowing contamination and leaks had occurred.

The EPA chose not to talk to surrounding landholders around the groundwater contamination zone, even though for months they knew that uranium contamination had taken place, and did not know if locals were drinking that water.

The EPA sat on a detailed 'holding statement' about the contamination event for months, which was watered down and then never released, all on the advice of the Office of Coal Seam Gas (OCSG). OCSG work closely with Santos, even though it regulates aspects of CSG (petroleum titles) alongside the EPA.

The EPA wrote a vague media statement about the pollution incident and \$1500 fine after the investigation was closed, and uploaded the media release to their website, only actually emailing the news to one media outlet, a newspaper in Narrabri that receives money from Santos, who chose not to publish the pollution incident or fine.

It is essential that the EPA act to protect the environment, not the interests of SANTOS, other CSG companies and coal mining interests.