Submission
No 233

INQUIRY INTO COAL SEAM GAS

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INQUIRY INTO COAL SEAM GAS
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The NSW Government has a social responsibility to ensure that before approving major new industries , such as coal seam gas activities in NSW that all stakeholders embrace the voluntary integration of social, ethical, sustainability and human rights principles in making decisions that affect the safety and well being of present and future generations business ensure that the people of NSW and the environment in which they live does not adversely affect their health and wellbeing.

Prior to responding to the questions set out in the terms of reference (TOR) I would seek to highlight a flaw in the drafting of the TOR . The TOR do not appear to have PEOPLE as a central component but rather the focus appears to be on the environment, energy and financial impacts. People are central to our society and their needs need to be of prime importance .

I note that the Terms of Reference (1) does refer to the health impacts of coal seam gas but it couples this with environment impacts. There are times when both have different priorities . The needs of people may compete with the environmental needs.

TOR (2) couples economic and social implications. This coupling is almost an oxymoron. Each needs to be considered separately as well as in combination. In terms of fair operating practices and human rights I know of no other business activity (except erection communication towers) which has been granted the right to set up business activities which affect health and wellbeing of residents on private land and within close proximity to peoples homes.

Term of Reference 1 Environmental impacts

- CSG mining represents a serious threat to water resources due to:
    1. The potential for drawdown and contamination of groundwater aquifers, including potential for major cumulative impacts on the Great Artesian Basin.
    2. The pollution of surface water systems from 'waste' water, leading to serious reductions in water quality.
    3. The use of large volumes of water for drilling and fracking in water systems that are already over-allocated, such as the Murray-Darling Basin.
    4. The location of CSG wells on sensitive floodplains and in water catchments.
- CSG mining produces vast quantities of waste that represent a serious environmental risk:
    1. Management of waste water is highly problematic and leads to environmental degradation where storage, leakage, spillage and discharge occurs.
    2. Treatment of waste water results in the production of a highly concentrated 'brine' by-product, that is extremely difficult to dispose of without causing harm.
- CSG mining represents a major threat to natural areas:
    1. It leads to extensive clearing and fragmentation of native bushland and threatened species habitat and increases the risk of catastrophic bushfires.
    2. It represents a major threat to wetland systems, even distant ones that are

hydrologically connected.
3. It transforms major vegetation remnants, refuges and corridors into industrial zones
4. Even protected areas and public lands are not safe – CSG mining can occur in areas bordering National Parks, and is permitted in State Conservation Areas and State Forests.

- CSG mining represents a serious risk to human health:
  1. Due to potential contamination of water used for human consumption and agricultural production with chemicals used in drilling or fracking as well as those present in the coal seam.
  2. From leakage of toxic methane and other gases during gas production and migration of methane into water supplies.
  3.

Term of Reference 2

- CSG mining causes major social impacts:
  1. Landholders face the prospect of losing control of their land, and property values are degraded and options for re-sale lost once exploration licences are issued.
  2. The social fabric of communities is drastically weakened, with evidence that communities dominated by fly-in/fly-out workers show higher incidence of violence and crime, soaring rents and worsened mental health outcomes.
- The rapid expansion the CSG industry looks set to have major economic impacts:
  1. Food security is threatened by risks to groundwater and loss of arable land.
  2. It is undermining economic diversity and leading to a skills shortage in other rural industries, and can lead to collapse of businesses unable to compete for staff.
  3. It is likely to impact negatively on a whole range of other industries such as organic farming, tourism, vineyards and orchards.
  4. It leads to important local infrastructure, such as roads, being run-down and damaged at a cost to the taxpayer.

  1. Royalties paid to the State create an expectation that projects will be approved, whilst failing to deliver sufficient funds to offset the impact of CSG.
  2. Local Government and local communities are currently largely excluded from the planning process and public participation and legal standing is inadequate.

Term of Reference 3

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- Coal seam gas is just one of many ways the future energy needs of NSW.
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- Most gas in NSW is extracted for export, not to meet local energy needs.
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There is insufficient research and attention given to solar energy

Minimal research is being conducted into nuclear power options

The massive expansion in coal seam gas production is delaying the transition to renewable energy alternatives.

Term of Reference 4

- Coal seam gas mining is exempt from a number of other environmental statutes, including the Native Vegetation Act 2003 and the Water Management Act 2000. This is UNACCEPTABLE
- Legislation controlling activities on public lands are inadequate to prevent coal seam gas mining, which when approved effectively privatises public lands.

Term of Reference 5

- Experience from Queensland: significant problems with leaking wells; impacts on

groundwater evidenced from drops in bore levels; growing social discord; an exploding wells at Dalby; major impacts on natural values near Gladstone; alienation of farmland and clearing of bushland. And prosecutions for the use of toxic chemicals

- Experience from overseas: regular fires associated with CSG wells, pipelines and facilities; chemicals used in fracking shown to be toxic to humans; systematic contamination of groundwater with methane;
- Some research suggests increased incidence of earthquakes after fracking.

Daphne Mc Curdy