

Submission  
No 320

## INQUIRY INTO COAL SEAM GAS

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## Parliamentary Inquiry in Coal Seam Gas

### Inquiry of General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5

Submission from Diana Simmons, small landholder in the Shire of Gloucester, New South Wales

First, let me congratulate the people who set up this Inquiry.

I am against the mining of Coal Seam Gas (CSG) on Agricultural, Crown Lands and National Parks in New South Wales and Queensland.

My main concerns are the protection of water quality, impacts of 'fracking', surface impediments and the prioritising of mining over agricultural land.

#### **Water Quantity and Quality: Impacts**

The CSG is trapped in the coal seam by water pressure. Releasing the gas means a lot of water is released. The National Water Commission predicts that the volume of water extracted by the CSG industry over the next 25 years is equivalent to more than half of the existing total extraction from the Great Artesian Basin (NWC Position paper, December 2010).

In the Gloucester area, where the Australian Gas Light Company, has approval to drill 110 wells, the company estimates that the equivalent volume of one Olympic swimming pool per day will be extracted across those fields.

The potential for toxic chemicals, Benzene, Toluene, Ethylbenzene and Xylene - found naturally in the coal seam gas seams - to be released in the mining process is also of concern. (Report of The National Toxics Network, June 2011.)

Mistakes happen! In August 2011, AGL received a formal warning from NSW Environment Minister regarding uncontrolled gas and water release at a CSG well near Campbelltown, NSW.

The National Water Commissioner, has warned that even if the water is treated, "The production of large volumes of treated waste water if released to surface water systems, could alter natural flow patterns and have significant impacts on water quality, and river and wetland health."

(NWC Position paper, December 2010.)

Interference with the Great Artesian Basin in any form is a risk. I grew up in north-western NSW with open bore drains providing water for stock. We also used our soft bore water for bathing, washing and gardening. We drank it when the rain water tanks ran empty in drought.

The open bores were banned due to concerns about evaporation and depletion of the aquifers. People a generation ago had the foresight to ban open bores because they valued water supply and quality.

### **'Fracking' Impacts**

The use of chemicals to speed the release of gas in 'fracking' poses danger to aquifers.

In their submission, Santos state that 'fracturing enhances the productivity of a gas well'; there is no danger of leakage from a properly constructed well and that the process has been used in the industry for sixty years. (Santos submission to Murray Darling Basin Inquiry.)

'Fracking' is banned in France, presently suspended in areas of UK, under suspension review in Quebec, Canada and operates under very strict conditions in New York State in the United States of America. We should take it as a warning that other countries have assessed this process as potentially dangerous to their aquifers and surface land.

## **Surface Impacts**

The lacework patterns of proposed piping brings to mind that only hurdlers need apply! With above ground pipes for the mines, roads for maintenance of the mines and trucks to railheads what space will be left for cropping if mines are allowed in agricultural areas?

## **Food security**

Australia is relatively free from contaminants in its food production. Asia grows wealthier and more demanding of fresh, healthy produce. Once the gas is mined and exported it is gone. Australian and overseas companies may make a lot of money in the short term. Agricultural production is long term.

## **Conclusion**

It is argued that CSG provides a 'bridge' from dirty coal to clean energy. With the building of new coal fired power stations, the reality is that we will be burning dirty coal for some time. The science is there to support solar to produce 20% of renewables by 2016, not to mention the contribution from wind power. (Radio National 'Saturday Extra', 3.9.2011.)

I submit that exploration and drilling licences be reviewed and the majority cancelled. If it means compensation - so be it.

Diana Simmons

## References:

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