

Submission
No 44

INQUIRY INTO COAL SEAM GAS

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Partially Confidential

or the Inquiry into Coal Seam Gas by the NSW
Legislative Council

As a concerned community member of the Northern Rivers Region please find following my submission:

1. *The environmental and health impact of CSG activities:*

- The impact on our water systems is of major concern. Not enough is fully revealed to the general public and indeed to government bodies, as to what chemicals are being used in the operation of extracting the methane gas. Although hydraulic fracturing is not used in all operations, there are other chemicals, which could cause damage to our ground and water systems. The actual waste water that is produced when extracting the coal seam gas is also another huge worry to our water systems. I have heard Dr Mariann Lloyd-Smith, Senior Advisor to the National Toxics Networks Inc speak at a meeting and was appalled at some of the chemicals and compounds of chemicals that she claims are being used in the process.
- It has been mentioned that travelling stock routes may be used to bypass farming lands for the use of pipelines etc. These stock routes are of utmost importance for the future of many of our woodland birds. I quote from a submission made by the Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc to the NSW Coal and Gas Strategy Scoping paper earlier this year. As an avid bird observer, I can only agree with their comments:

"HBOC points out that travelling stock routes and road reserves are key areas of remnant vegetation with high biodiversity values, which provide important wildlife corridors between more extensive areas of remnant vegetation. We would prefer an attitude, which acknowledged the importance of remnant vegetation in road reserves and travelling stock routes and put the conservation of this habitat ahead of the use of these areas as utility corridors"

- In regard to nature and effectiveness of remediation as required under the act, I can only assume this refers to the mining companies caring for the environment before, during and after the process of extraction of methane gas. As mining companies are self-regulatory, I really don't believe this is being carried out, as it should be. From what I can see in other states and indeed in NSW, the destruction that happens with the exploration and mining process itself is appalling. I know the mining companies say they follow stringent environmental procedures, but I'm sorry to say that like a lot of the general public, I am very skeptical about this. One only has to observe what is happening in the Pilliga Scrub to see proof of the destruction caused.
- From my research into the industry, it seems to me that this form of energy is not clean and green as we are led to believe. It doesn't seem as if this type of mining is any cleaner or better for the environment than the use of traditional fossil fuels. In fact, the impact will be far greater to many different environments and people as the search for this resource is going to spread far and wide in NSW affecting land and peoples who have never before experienced the mining industry and all that comes with it. It has become a mad rush to get as many exploration licences for coal seam gas as possible, regardless of the consequences. I liken this scenario to the gold rushes of our early days only on a much more massive scale as we now have people living in places that were unheard of in those days. I believe the environmental impact of this industry will be one of the greatest of devastation for our landscape and rural areas. Australia is still lucky to have beautiful areas, unique flora and fauna and

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landscapes not found anywhere else in the world. If this industry were to proceed unchecked, I despair and fear for our future generations. Yes we might have money but we also might have industrialized wastelands in our countryside and rural areas.

2. *The economic and social implications of CSG activities:*

- The legal right of landholders (we are not property owners as stated in the terms of reference) and property values is of grave concern. Never before have so many ordinary Aussies been confronted with such a challenge. Most Australians think that when they buy their property, spend a lot of money developing and improving it they own it. What a shock for many people when they find out otherwise! The social implications of this industry are frightening, as generally, despite what mining companies say, the ordinary person is not treated with respect and is often bullied into complying with laws that were put into effect many years ago, some even in the 19th Century. If we were truly property owners then we should have more rights in regard to the use of land we have looked after and developed. I realise that at this time the resources under the ground belong to the Crown but that doesn't take away from the fact that this is a devastating thing to happen to people. Here is a quote from a submission made by Doctors for the Environment to the Rural Affairs and Transport References Committee Inquiry into Management of the Murray Darling Basin in regard to mental health of peoples affected by mining:

"Mental Health Impacts

Water and air pollution, water shortages, permanent degradation of productive agricultural land and loss of livelihood and landscape...all have mental health consequences for communities living in a gas field.

Solastalgia is a recently developed concept in Australian psychiatry, which identifies and describes environmentally induced distress. *'As opposed to nostalgia the melancholia or homesickness experienced by individuals when separated from a loved home, solastalgia is the distress that is produced by environmental change impacting on people while they are directly connected to their home environment'.*"

This issue has to be taken seriously even though we hear over and over that this industry is for the benefit of all the people in the state. There are going to be a lot of people sacrificed for the good of the state unless there are changes made to legislation to better protect people affected.

- Food security and agricultural activity have to be given top priority in this issue. I can't understand why our agricultural land is not considered important enough to save. Mining companies are buying up our prime agricultural land at an alarming rate with no thought for the future. To make matters worse, many of the companies that are buying our land are foreign owned. This has to be of concern for the future of feeding Australians and indeed other countries as well.
- Money is the key issue here. According to what I have read, NSW has a vast amount of coal seam gas worth billions of dollars supposedly for a long time. How true this is I don't know, but money is the most important thing in our society today with no regard for the consequences of how it is obtained or the affect it will have on the environment and people. I realise that our state needs money to operate but once again I ask at what cost? Compensation for landholders is very poor compared to the royalties that go to the state with mining activities. Community consultation and local government involvement is minimal and quite often there are meetings behind closed doors that the general public can't attend or don't know about. Honesty and transparency is not a strong point with mining companies and indeed all levels of government. There is a groundswell of opposition from all walks of life to the mad rush for CSG. Mining companies and governments do generally not appreciate this

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opposition but as we still live in a democracy, people's concerns have to be taken seriously.

3. *The role of CSG in meeting future energy needs of NSW:*

- Whilst I can see some benefit into the development of the coal seam gas industry, I would not like to see it as a resource that we depend upon entirely. Until such times that it is proven completely safe, environmental issues are dealt with effectively and independent research has been put in place in regard to the process and use of chemicals, I would like to see more money invested in renewable energies. I personally come from a family long involved with the Sydney Gas Company but I'm still concerned about the ramifications of the headlong rush to explore and extract coal seam gas over vast tracts of rural land, near towns and cities and especially near creeks and rivers and in water catchments.

4. *The interaction of the Act with other legislation and regulations, including the Land Acquisition Act 1991:*

- Once again, I have done some research into the history of the acts, which have been legislated over the years and feel that it is time for a great change. Many of these acts are now outdated and do not apply to modern times, especially with the current population compared to when many of the original acts were legislated. The coal seam gas expansion seems like an invasion to many people and legislation has to change to take into consideration the changing face of Australia and Australians. We have more access to information than ever before and people are becoming more aware. Many of these acts have been introduced to enable governments to access resources not originally included in earlier legislation. Legislation needs to be reviewed and the mining act (s) updated to make sure the rights of landholders are increased and respected.

To conclude I would like to make the following recommendations:

- A full moratorium be placed on all forms of coal seam gas drilling until environmental, social and health impacts have been rigorously and independently assessed.
- Coal seam gas exploration and mining to be made subject to all relevant environmental legislation including the native vegetation and water management laws.
- The provision of standing to ensure that the community has full legal rights to challenge and enforce environmental laws under which coal seam gas companies are operating.
- The provision of a right in the Petroleum (Onshore) Act to allow landholders to refuse consent for coal seam gas exploration or production on their land and landholders to be treated with respect at all times.
- A prohibition on coal seam gas exploration and mining in important bushland, valuable farmland, world heritage areas, groundwater aquifers, near creeks and rivers, in catchment areas, residential areas and public lands.
- All chemicals used in coal seam gas drilling or hydraulic fracturing must be assessed by the chemical regulator before being approved for use.
- Legislation reviewed, amended and updated to protect landholders and to provide improved compensation for landholders.
- Honesty and transparency by mining companies to be compulsory.