

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

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Date received: 18/07/2014

Performance of the NSW Environment Protection Authority (Inquiry)

On March 8, 2014 Sean Nicholls stated that Santos was fined \$1500 by the NSW Environment Protection Authority. It did so without identifying the nature of the contamination. It has since been revealed that the contamination occurred from a leaking pond which drained into an aquifer. The aquifer contained uranium at levels 20 times safe drinking guidelines. For this, the EPA levelled a fine of only \$1500.

Two days later Deputy Premier Andrew Stoner signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Santos to speed up the project in the Pilliga Forest near Narrabri, guaranteeing a decision on its future by January 23 next year. It is alleged that Santos knew that the pond was faulty two years ago. Lock the Gate Alliance president Drew Hutton goes further and asserts "the waste water dam that caused this pollution seems to have been leaking since 2007 and is still being used by Santos". Santos says the pond was decommissioned in December 2011 and new water is not being added. The difference between these statements needs to be investigated to determine their accuracy.

No mention is made of any investigations by the EPA of the distance travelled by the polluted water in the aquifer. The EPA has confirmed the contamination was caused by water leaking from the pond and that lead, aluminium, arsenic, barium, boron, nickel and uranium had been detected in the aquifer at levels 'elevated when compared to livestock, irrigation and health guidelines'.

It is difficult to understand why the Government would wish to expedite the program which Santos is undertaking to extract coal seam gas in view of the revelations that the EPA itself has made about the adverse environmental effects of the program.

Not only is the Santos program diminishing the volume of Australia's supply of fresh water but climate change forecasts indicate that an El Nino phase is 90% certain with higher temperatures for eastern Australia with a lot less rain.

Has the EPA not made its concerns known to the Government in sufficiently strong terms? Is the EPA not following up this problem?