

Submission
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INQUIRY INTO COAL SEAM GAS

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The Director

General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5

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INQUIRY INTO COAL SEAM GAS ACTIVITIES

The already incontrovertible impacts of coal seam gas activities behoves government to impose a moratorium on them pending rigorous and independent full assessment. Similarly, it is self-evident that it is imperative to require such activities to be subject to the relevant environmental legislation, including native vegetation and water management laws. The grave risk to water resources, especially from potential drawdown and contamination of aquifers must be assiduously assessed, including the cumulative impact. Strategic landuse planning must prohibit CSG exploration and exploitation in groundwater aquifers, arable farmland and important remnant vegetation. And to provide for the inevitable political limitations in achieving practical outcomes, the Petroleum (Onshore) Act should allow landholders to refuse consent for coal seam gas exploration or production on their land. Similarly, there need to be legal standing for the community to challenge and enforce environmental laws.

I am opposed to Coal Seam Gas Mining for many reasons, but especially because it is an incredibly polluting industry with grave risks to the health of the natural environment and water resources, and to human health also, and to the wellbeing of landholders and rural producers. CSG mining makes a very significant contribution to greenhouse gasses and therefore to global warming, pollutes ground and surface

water, increases clearing of remnant native vegetation, releases toxic chemicals into the environment, and leads to loss of arable land and decline in rural productivity.

The industry represents a loss to taxpayers for private overseas beneficiaries. Exploration and development activity should cease pending thorough assessment of impacts and demonstration that controls will ensure the industry can be sustainable and in the long-term interests of the community.

Thank you for undertaking this Inquiry; it is highly appropriate given the community unrest and reaction to the flurry of widespread expansion of the CSG mining industry.

I am most particularly concerned about the environmental and health effects of CSG exploration and mining.

The puncturing of the groundwater aquifers in itself is a serious risk issue with respect to both water quantity and quality. There is potential for drawdown of the water table, at local and regional scales. The cumulative effect in any assessment must be taken in to account. The intermingling of groundwaters has potential for contamination of fresh waters by salinity.

Then the drilling and fracking uses large volumes of water, and this would be most likely to be in already overallocated water systems. This CSG mining not only uses chemicals that put water used for human consumption and agricultural production at grave risk of contamination from them but also from the methane and other toxic gases leakage in to the water during the gas production.

Water quality is also diminished in surface water systems by the disposal and storage of the saline groundwater/chemically contaminated drilling water that is brought up out of the drill holes and wells. The waste water management is a very big problem in both scale and risk assessment.

CSG activities impose a grave risk on the precious water resource of this continent. It is not appropriate to proceed in ignorance and optimism - "she'll be right mate" CSG activities threaten precious ecosystem functioning. Groundwater dependent ecosystems, wetlands, floodplain and riparian zone vegetation communities have already been grossly impacted by the European occupation of this old country. It would be a travesty and probably the last straw to further degrade the groundwater systems by a rampant CSG industry

It seems both paradoxical and yet internally consistent at the same time that a society struggling to come to terms with the consequences of the past 200 years of industrial activity seems to be hellbent on a last hurrah - rampant poisoning of the waters and drawdown of the water tables.

The potential of CSG activities impact on remnant native vegetation, particularly of public lands, is also outrageous. The Travelling Stock Routes are vitally important refuges and corridors. They should not become industrial sites of gas pipeline and associated infrastructure. The massive expansion in coal seam gas production is delaying the transition to renewable energy alternatives. The socio-economic and energy cost and benefit analysis, if done assiduously, would show the CSG side of the ledger to be found wanting.

Coal seam gas is a fossil fuel and a significant source of greenhouse gas pollution. It generates more than 40 times the amount of greenhouse gas per unit of energy generated than solar or wind. Coal seam gas will make a major contribution to global warming, particularly when fugitive emissions and liquefaction prior to export are fully considered.

It is at essence wrong to obtain private benefit at the expense of public good. This wrong is greatly compounded when the risk to the environment and health is so apparent. All CSG activities must be subject to existing relevant environmental

legislation and assessment , including the native vegetation and water management laws. It is untoward that they currently do not. It is wrong for CSG mining to be permitted in public lands, it is effectively privatising these lands. There needs to be 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 NSW Petroleum (Onshore) Act 1991 should also provide for private landholder veto rights. Community outrage is widespread and growing.

It is clear that GPSC No 5 should recommend a full moratorium on all forms of coal seam gas drilling until the environmental, social and health impacts have been rigorously and independently assessed.

Consequential changes to legislative and regulatory practice should also be recommended to protect the environment and the wellbeing of the people of NSW, now and in to the future.

The CSG industry is not necessary. Solar thermal and other renewable energy sources need to be developed; not coal seam gas mining that has so little public benefit other than uniting people in their opposition to it.

Thank you for the opportunity for input to this issue.

Yours sincerely

Marg McLean.

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