

**Submission  
No 73**

## **INQUIRY INTO COAL SEAM GAS**

**Name:** Mrs Natalie Tydd

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*Submission to the Coal Seam Gas (Inquiry) - Legislative Council General Purpose Standing Committee  
No.5*

I write in response to your request for submissions into the direction of coal seam gas mining in New South Wales. I request:

1. A full moratorium on all forms of coal seam gas drilling until the environmental, social and health impacts have been rigorously and independently assessed.
2. Any application for renewal of a Petroleum Exploration Licence be rejected and not rolled over as is usual practice. Ensuring it will not fall into the retrospective category protecting it from the new regime to be applied to CSG applications.
3. 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.

My name is Natalie Tydd I am a 4<sup>th</sup> generation farmer. I represent our family's agricultural interest in the Bellata/Gurley districts. Together we farm thousands of hectares of highly productive agricultural land held under freehold title where values exceed \$4000 per hectare. Predominately we produce durum wheat, dryland cotton, chickpeas and beef. In addition we have a value-added business Bellata Gold that operates a durum mill and pasta making facility whereby we turn the durum wheat grown on our farms into an award winning pasta that is sold domestically and exported around the world. Together we employ 29 people with an additional 20 casual staff. We have been approached for an access agreement to drill a core hole and our response has been to "lock the gate", choosing not to negotiate with mining companies.

We hold the view that the coal seam gas industry cannot co-exist with sustainable broadacre farming due to the environmental, economic and social impacts imposed by CSG.

#### Environmental

Summer rain is intense and water erosion is a major issue on our black, self-mulching clay soils. We manage this by reducing tillage, retaining stubble or planting cover crops in addition to the installation of contour banks and waterways to convey storm water from the upper slopes to natural water courses at the base of the slopes. CSG infrastructure installed on a 750 metre grid pattern with interconnecting gravel roads poses problems for this carefully designed and constructed soil conservation system. Concentration of runoff water against the side of the gravel roads will cause the formation of a gully against the road and possibly cause erosion damage to the road itself. Where these roads need to cross the contour bank there will be additional problems as the bank's hydraulic capacity will be reduced causing stormwater to overtop the bank resulting in severe gully erosion below the bank. Where installation of underground gas and water pipes result in a change to the

surface level, water will accumulate causing erosion of the pipeline. Any development on these productive but fragile black soils can result in serious erosion if inappropriately designed and constructed. We also actively manage salinity on our soils and any development that impacts on the groundwater flow system may contribute to soil scalding.

At an operational level we carry out controlled traffic farming confining compaction to permanent traffic lanes optimising soil conditions and reducing overlap. The machinery we use is 36m wide, set-up on 3m wheel spacing and equipped with the latest GPS navigation systems. Machinery of this scale requires plenty of room to move and turn around. Fields need to be free of any fencing, ponds, dams and roads. A ¼ acre well site every 250 acres with interconnecting gravel roads and pipelines would severely hinder our use of this machinery.

### Economic

Investment in the latest farm equipment delivers both environmental and economic benefits. For example the use of GPS navigation delivers immediate production savings of 10-12%; that means less diesel, less chemicals, less water. The more obstacles you put in a paddock, like a gravel road, the more overlap you get and those savings are diminished. Rural property agents warn that the value of properties affected by gas mining have fallen considerably and are becoming increasingly harder to sell. Any reduction in our equity levels due to falling land values will impact on our ability to meet repayment commitments and access future borrowings. This impedes our ability to invest in modern machinery also essential to achieve economies of scale that would otherwise be unattainable in what has become a competitive labour market, no doubt affected by the loss of workers to the mining industry.

### Social impacts

There has been countless sleepless nights worrying whether the intrusions caused by the mining process will become too much to bare. The property rights and values of landholders under current legislation do not provide a level playing field. All we can do is deny access to our properties but we do so with the threat of arbitration. Let's assume I am forced to grant access to my property for the purpose of drilling a corehole. I would have 23 pieces of equipment brought onto my property from trucks to portaloos in addition to 16 personnel, presumably men, all unknown to me. This operation is permitted to be carried out 200 metres from my home and will operate 24/7 from 21 days up to 6 months. During the day I am home alone with my two small children it is also common for me to be alone at night. As a young woman who is geographically isolated from neighbours and law enforcement I hold concerns for my young family under these conditions.

Bellata has been 'home' my entire life. Together with my husband we have built a home, life and business with the intention of continuing our family's proud farming heritage. I am now questioning if this is a realistic ambition. Perhaps there are people who think I am being alarmist, but we have the value of hindsight – better known as Queensland. If the industry was without risk and the companies were doing the right thing then their reputation would precede them and this senate inquiry would be unnecessary.

The government needs to take the time to ensure there are no adverse environmental impacts as a result of CSG exploration and mining. If this can be independently proven then the government needs to give landholders back the rights to CSG under their land, or at the very minimum the right to refuse access. Only then will sensible commercial outcomes be capable of being negotiated that take into account:

- The real cost to landholders from loss of production land.
- The sustainability of the farming asset after the mining industry has completed its extraction.
- The social loss to landholders from the imposition of the CSG industry on their family, staff and homes.
- The compensation of Local Government for use of roads and services.

Yours sincerely,

Natalie Tydd