

**Submission
No 806**

INQUIRY INTO COAL SEAM GAS

Name: Mr Derek Walker

Date received: 7/09/2011

7 September 2011

Submission to the General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5 of the Legislative Council of the NSW Parliament – Inquiry into Coal Seam Gas – September 2011

This submission is brief. Smarter people than I will tackle the technical details relating to why CSG is an industry and energy source that must be extremely controlled and limited to the few places in Australia – if any – where the extraction process can be performed safely. I expect therefore that the industry should be banned completely, and will be banned if the NSW government act on the findings of this enquiry to amend the relevant legislation accordingly.

I've been a professional engineer and I understand the attraction of petroleum exploration and extraction work. I also understand that some people want to get rich and that working in the CSG industry is one way of achieving that. These people must be blinded by the excitement of the work and/or their greed not to realise that the risk of damage from CSG exploration and extraction to the environment, nature (bushland, wetlands, wildlife, etc.), people's health, food supplies and water supplies is too great for this industry to be allowed to operate. I've heard the explanations from the CSG industry employees at public meetings in Sydney, saying "oh it's only exploration at this stage" and "we are using the latest technology which is superior to the equipment used before". They must think that the community assembled at these meetings are stupid – if they explore and find the site to be economically viable then they will extract, and that is obviously the outcome they are hoping for. And the new technology does not reduce the risk to zero meaning the operation is totally safe for people and the environment. Incidents do happen – there is proof of this in Australia – so the risk is high, so the industry should be banned.

There is nothing that is safe about this industry; in fact it is probably the most hazardous means of extracting gas in Australia. I am an advocate of all clean alternative energy sources: wind, solar, wave, etc. Nuclear energy is NOT clean either as, when the full life-cycle, from mining the uranium to disposing of the waste is considered, the emissions from this industry are huge.

The danger to the environment and health I refer to above relates to all the Terms of Reference of this Inquiry:

The risk of contamination of ground and surface water systems by the chemicals used or harmful chemicals locked underground is too great – humans and other life forms in Australia need clean water,

The chemicals cause pollution of the air impacting locally on the health of people and other life forms,

Hydraulic fracturing is the most hazardous process and must be banned,

Crown Lands including travelling stock routes (which form an important network of wildlife corridors) and State forests, plus National Parks especially where threatened species or ecological communities exist must be protected from the CSG industry, especially with the threat of climate change to our wildlife and biodiversity,

Remediation of the land is very difficult if there is an incident and when underground damage occurs (e.g. to aquifers) it is impossible,

Greenhouse gases and other emissions can be dramatic if there is an incident – methane emissions have occurred and we know how much worse this is than CO₂ for climate change,

Even when compared to other forms of gas exploration and extraction (e.g. as occurring Western Australia) – which I am also not in favour of compared to clean alternatives – CSG has (through the inevitable incidents) relatively high air quality and environmental impacts compared to alternative fossil fuels.

I was considering moving out of Sydney to find a property where I could live in a more sustainable way as well as possibly restoring some of the land to healthy indigenous native plant communities. There is a world wide trend towards returning to this healthier and more sustainable way of life, for economic as well as social and environmental reasons. CSG is currently such a threat to this that I am now scared to make this move to the country. Obviously existing land holders are also scared and the legislation needs to be changed to protect this land from such destruction and to protect property values.

Food security and agricultural activity is far more important for the growing population of NSW, Australia and the world, than CSG especially when there are alternative energy sources available that do not threaten food security.

There are better alternatives than CSG (that don't have the risks of CSG) for assisting regional development, investment and employment, and State competitiveness. NSW should move away from polluting fossil fuels rapidly by immediately fully supporting clean energy alternatives – through schemes such as the carbon tax. Beyond Zero Emissions have fully costed proposals that include expanding and new alternative energy industries.

As far as royalties are concerned, mining activities nation-wide should be taxed more so that all Australians can benefit from the exploitation of our natural resources, while more of this revenue is put towards renewable energy development and environmental reformation. CSG is too risky so any royalties argument is redundant.

Local Government including provision of local/regional infrastructure and local planning control mechanisms – these need to be properly resourced and supported so that harmful developments such as CSG when assessed are identified and legitimately rejected, and not bypassed or just ticked off.

Regarding the role of CSG in meeting the future energy needs of NSW and the specific Terms of Reference for this, I believe as stated above the risks from CSG are too high and alternatives exist that can satisfy our energy demands if we have the determination to move rapidly to clean energy - for energy supply, development of new technologies (such as electric vehicles) and industries.

I believe there should now be an immediate moratorium on new CSG exploration and extraction activities, including the issuing or renewal of licences. People, the environment, water and agriculture deserve this protection now so that we do not make the same mistakes as other countries such as the USA.

Faithfully,
Derek G. Walker