

**Submission
No 561**

INQUIRY INTO COAL SEAM GAS

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The Director
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5
Parliament House
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The Director,

The Hon Martin Ferguson AM, MP Minister for Resources and Energy; Minister for Tourism recently opened the Ausgrid Smart Grid Smart City display centre in Newcastle NSW. He spoke of the clean, responsible, environmental initiatives Newcastle was taking for our community, our children and our future, not just post BHP but as a growing leader in sustainable green technologies and industry balanced with lifestyle.

Allowing Coal Seam Gas Mining in Fullerton Cove, Newcastle and throughout NSW is a decision that will affect all generations and has the potential to damage forever our limited water resources, our ecological balance and our lives. It has unqualified and unidentified risks which have not yet been properly researched, understood, assessed or debated. My family is calling for a freeze on expanding this industry until the impact can be understood and regulated.

Our concerns are as follows:

- **Unqualified risks.** At the public information day at Williamstown, Dart Energy Ltd (Head Office Singapore) were unable to offer a guarantee that no water or aquifer contamination or pipe leaks would occur. Analysis of waste in some areas of CSG mining reportedly found hundreds of industrial chemicals, and carcinogens linked to leukaemia at levels 6 to 15 times safe drinking water standards. In addition to use of toxic chemicals, it has been estimated that coal seam gas mining will bring over 50 million tonnes of underground salt to the surface. Do these issues have substance and relevance to CSG here in the Hunter? Surely governments need to address this before the drilling begins, not afterwards.
- **Habitat Destruction.** Fullerton Cove is part of the International RAMSAR listed Hunter Estuary Wetlands community. The Cove is not just the edge of the waterway but stretches up between the Tomago and Stockton sand beds to include the flood plains between the cove and Tilligerry Creek, Port Stephens. Water knows no political boundaries. Fullerton Cove is home to over 250 species of birds, 45 listed under international migratory conservation agreements as well as the Green and Golden Bell Frog and Koala habitat. Any risk to this diverse habitat should be removed.
- **Land Subsidence.** After the deep aquifers are pumped out and the upper aquifers naturally drain down to the deep cavities left by the mining, the earth's surface crust could subside. Fullerton Cove is already close to sea level. What possible remediation could there be to repair this type of damage? I wonder, does the Mines Subsidence Board cover this risk?
- **Aquifer contamination and pollution.** Water is the reason we are here. The Hunter River including Fullerton Cove, the Stockton and Tomago sand bed aquifers are all intertwined. The sand beds filter the water and provide a stored back-up of safe drinking water for the Hunter and Central Coast. Fullerton Cove residents are on tank water and utilize the ground aquifers for sustainable irrigation and cattle watering. This ground or bore water is also used extensively by the residents of Stockton. Any potential risk to this clean natural resource should be removed.

- **Primary Producers.** Fullerton Cove during the depression and war years was a valuable food bowl for Newcastle with market garden produce ferried to Market Square in Hunter Street. Today it supports Angus beef studs, alpaca studs, horse studs including racing stables and Olympic level equestrian stables, sheep and goat meat farms and table bird farms. The cove itself supports oyster farming and the prawning industry. Any risk that may contaminate the eco systems here would have a devastating effect on these primary producers and should not be allowed.
- **Lower Hunter Acid Sulphate Soil Disturbance.** This poses a major threat to coastal and marine ecosystems and has the potential to impact threatened species. The interlinked areas of Kooragang Island Wetlands, Ash Island, Shortland Wetlands, Hexham Swamp, Tomago Wetlands and Fullerton Cove should be protected from any significant disturbance such as CSG mining.
- **Very Poor Government Policy.** The NSW Labor Government has allowed CSG exploration drilling at Fullerton Cove and granted a five year royalty-free period for gas mining in NSW, without calling for proper safe regulations, yet CSG mining is apparently exempt from the Native Vegetation Act and the Water Management Act. Who is safeguarding the environment and the people? CSG is not required to meet the future energy needs of NSW. Most of this gas is intended for export as supported by the \$300million gas plant development application at Tomago linked to the harbor and shipping.
- **Loss of Property Values.** To make CSG viable I understand the companies need at least 100 drill points. In a small semi-rural hamlet like Fullerton Cove, this will be detrimental to our property value and the aesthetic and scenic value of the area as a gateway for tourism from the airport or Nelson Bay. Gloucester already has applications for 300 drilling rigs bearing down on them. So much for the positive move away from unsustainable logging to a greener eco-tourism future.

We must have a moratorium on all forms of Coal Seam Gas (CSG) drilling until the environmental, social and health impacts have been rigorously and independently tested and prohibition on CSG exploration and mining in important bushland, valuable farmland, groundwater aquifers, residential areas and public lands.

Please stand up for our environment, our community and our children.

Justin Hamilton