

**Submission
No 466**

INQUIRY INTO COAL SEAM GAS

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**SUBMISSION TO GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE No5 OF
NSW LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ON INQUIRY INTO COAL SEAM GAS**

1. The environmental and health impact of CSG activities including:

a) Effect on ground and surface water

It's well reported and documented that (in Southern Queensland) the CSG industry interferes with the ground water in several ways.

First of all by extracting ground water it depletes the surrounding areas of this vital element, destroying the surrounding biodiversity and disturbing the aquifers, changing the pH and composition of the surrounding soil, and degradation of the land including salinity in an irreversible way, scientists say.

Undisclosed chemicals used in undisclosed amounts in many of the processes of CSG, are injected into the soil contaminating the underground and surface water that ultimately feeds the river systems and the dams and finally our food and home taps. Equally, the surface waters can be contaminated so easily with the usage of chemicals and byproducts of fracturing, contaminating draining lines and finally into a river catchments.

All these serious risks apply to the AGL proposal Camden Gas Project- Stage3 (Scenic Hills), where 3 wellheads sites (24 wells) are proposed to be upslope and in close proximity to watercourses.

Another wellhead site (4 wells) is proposed to be located on an eroded section of land only 50 meters from Thompson Creek, which eventually flows into the Georges River. This wellhead is also proposed to be only 300 meters upstream of the Council owned and maintained Eagle Vale Reserve which is used for community recreational activities.

b) Effects related to the use of chemicals

Practically, the mining industry is self-regulated, there aren't enough regulations in place and authority to scrutinize closely their processes; there isn't transparency on the disclosure of names and amounts of the chemicals used in the fracking process. In many cases, we have seen that the relevant government Department is unaware of the chemicals used, for example when the Queensland Minister for Energy was asked

by Liz Hayes during an interview in the TV program 60 Minutes, if he knew which chemicals were used in the CSG, he couldn't answer the question.

Dr, Helen Redmond, NSW representative for Doctors for the Environment Australia, argues that some chemicals used in drilling and hydraulic fracturing are naturally occurring contaminants released from the coal seam during mining, and could harm human health including increased risk of cancer.

In the recent days, we were made aware through all the media that traces of the carcinogenic B-Tex chemicals have been found in monitoring bores at a coal seam gas operation on Queensland's Darling Downs. It was highlighted that B-Tex chemicals have been found 3 or 4 times before during CSG operations .

c) Effects related to hydraulic fracturing

CSG mining has the following detrimental effects:

- High demand for the vital and precious element water, causing ground water depletion.
- Use and storage of dangerous chemicals
- Waste production including saline solutions and chemicals waste
- Disturbance and interference of the natural aquifers
- Contamination of soil, water and air with chemicals used in the process, and added contamination by the release of natural chemicals that are disturbed during fracking, such as the B-TEX group and radioactive all of them carcinogenics.
- Production of greenhouse gases: carbon dioxide and methane that escapes to the atmosphere through leakage.
- Destruction of biodiversity, including endangered species of flora and fauna
- Physical aspect change to an “industrial area or gasfield”
- Noise close to our residential homes, schools and churches.
- Usage of our residential streets with heavy trucks transporting heavy industrial machinery, chemicals and waste
- Devaluation of land and property nearby.

d) Effects of Crown Lands and State Forest

The Scenic Hills is not Crown land but one of the few green buffers in the ever growing population of the Macarthur area; its “zoned environmental protection”, extractive industries and mines are prohibited under the Campbelltown Council zoning System.

Nevertheless it's in danger to become a gas field if the State Government approves the AGL Ltd proposal.

The Scenic Hills is home of threatened fauna and flora species such as the Cumberland Land Snail.

Scenic Hills is an important icon in the landscape of Campbelltown LGA.

A draft Visual Study being prepared for Council as part of the preparation of a consolidated Local Environmental Plan applying to the whole of the Campbelltown LGA, concluded that “The landscapes of the Scenic Hills provide the setting for the City of Campbelltown and are what make it a truly unique example of a satellite city”

e) Nature and effectiveness of remediation required under the Act

The AGL Ltd Camden Project- Stage 3 proposal, involves 26 existing residential suburbs and there are more residential developments in progress, namely Gregory Hills and Oran Park, where Landcom is presently selling land and it has been publicized in the Sydney Morning Herald that the prospective new residents haven't been told about the CSG proposal of AGL Ltd.

The Scenic Hills in the suburb of Varroville is a small rural residential holding, recreational establishment and farms, set up in the belief their rural tranquility was protected, yet NSW legislation allows AGL to ignore this and treat the area as if it was zoned for heavy industry

The Act should be amended by prohibiting any sort of mining close to residential homes, prime agricultural land and protected areas such as the Scenic Hills

f) Effect on greenhouse gas and other emissions

Respected scientists such as Professor Alan Randall (University of Sydney) argue that CSG mining has a more detrimental impact on the environment compared to alternative fossil fuels, the reasons being that CSG mining has a voracious demand for water, especially groundwater, treatment and disposal of contaminated waste water, disturbance and fragmentation of land surface, contamination from drilling and hydro-

fracturing fluids, land subsidence, potentially irreparable damage and destruction of aquifers and the liberation of methane and carbon dioxide into the atmosphere (greenhouse gases). These facts then invalidate the CSG industry claims that CSG produces a carbon clean energy

2. The Economic and Social Implications of CSG

I am afraid that the current governing Act doesn't take into account the legal rights of property owners, who are left with little option but to sell land in many cases passed on through generations. If they decide to stay because property values fall and may be the property is not even saleable, their lives have been turned up side down because now they are living in the middle of a dirty and polluting industry, only 200 meters from a house and 50 metres away from the garden. I don't think this is fair in a country like Australia, where it's said that everybody has a fair go.

Regarding prime agricultural land, the government has to see this issue very seriously, and action needs to be taken to amend the Act in prohibiting any kind of mining in prime agricultural land, protected areas or close to residential homes. Unfortunately the greediness of this industry and the blindness of the government at all levels are allowing CSG to take on our most precious and fertile agricultural land in Queensland and Northern NSW. The imminent risk is, of these areas ending up as gas fields, with a good harvest of methane gas to satisfy the voracious appetite of China and other Asian countries, that afterwards, when they have satisfied their gas appetite, will be competing with and demanding Australian crops that we won't be able to be produced, not even for ourselves, because by then the fields will be useless and damaged irreversibly according to respected scientists. Australian governments, both State and Federal, ought to be cautious and stop this crazy natural resources rush before it's too late.

It is undeniable that we need investment, collect royalties and create jobs but not at such high cost of sacrificing and destroying our agriculture industry if CSG takes on agricultural land, or destroying our health and wellbeing if CSG mining takes place in the suburbs and the cities and or destroying the habitat of fauna and flora, in many cases, of endangered species.

3. The Role of CSG in meeting the future energy needs of NSW

Unfortunately, the CSG industry including AGL Ltd argues that we need “natural gas” to meet Australia or the State energy needs and that CSG provides clean energy. None of these arguments are valid. The truth of the matter is, that there is a rush of gas extraction to satisfy China and other Asian countries demands, this means that most of the gas of the CSG industry is exported. The other truth is that the process of CSG, releases carbon dioxide and methane (greenhouse gases) to the environment.

The rational first step of the Australian government should be to pull in the reins on the Coal Seam Gas industry, and at the same time put in place tight legislation to correct all the deficiencies of this industry.

Australia, a country with abundant sunshine should be fostering real sources of clean energy such as solar energy.

The Australian Government should beef up the research sector for other sources of renewable energy and should be working with other countries like Germany to develop genuine clean and renewable energy.

The mentality of the politicians “Growth at any cost” ought to change or the future of Australia (and our children) is grim.

After 20 years of CSG mining ,we wouldn’t like to see the longer-term costs of mining when the nation’s finite land resources are gone, when our children are left with empty gasfields and without sources of food and the suburbs and their people with increased health problems and our precious endangered species have finally gone forever.

4. The Interaction of the Act with other legislation and regulations, including Land Acquisition

There ought to be a fluid communication and understanding between the different government regulating offices.

Regarding the Camden Gas Project- Stage 3 proposal and reading the last submission of the Campbelltown City Council to the Department of Planning (DoP) dated December 2010, when the then disgraced State Labor government was in power, I got to realized that the Department of Planning had a culture of ignoring the concerns raised by other bodies such as the New South Wales Office of Water (NOW) and the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water (DECCW).

By the same token, Campbelltown City Council submissions including well founded recommendations, requests, concerns, etc, were all ignored by the DoP and AGL Ltd. Finally in December 2010, a frustrated Campbelltown Council let the DoP know “ its Strong objection to the project application”.

From these facts, I give my vote of no confidence to AGL Ltd and to the DoP of the ousted government.

In 2010, the community of Campbelltown was practically unaware of the magnitude of the intentions of AGL Ltd to transform 26 suburbs into gas mining fields and the building of 72 gas collecting wells in the Scenic Hills. This means that there wasn't an honest and frank consultation with the Community as AGL Ltd claims.

Recently, the community has become more aware about CSG and our voice loud and clear to the Department of Planning and AGL Ltd. is “We don't want Coal Seam Gas in Campbelltown and leave our Scenic Hills alone”