Submission
No 612

INQUIRY INTO COAL SEAM GAS

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Submission

Terms of Reference 2. The economic and social implications of CSG activities

According to "'Science Summit' on World Population: A Joint Statement by 58 of the World's Scientific Academies,""It took hundreds of thousands of years for our species to reach a population level of 10 million, only 10,000 years ago. This number grew to 100 million people about 2,000 years ago and to 2.5 billion by 1950. Within less than the span of a single lifetime, it has more than doubled to 5.5 billion in 1993...We face the prospect of a further doubling of the population within the next half century." *Population and Development Review* 20 (1994) as cited in The Legacy by David Suzuki, 2010. The joint statement by 58 scientific academies also notes that "in the last decade, food production from both land and sea has declined relative to population growth. The area of agricultural land has shrunk... The availability of water is already a constraint in some countries. These are warnings that the earth is finite and that natural systems are being pushed ever closer to their limits." Cited from The Legacy by David Suzuki, 2010, p20-21

World Population as of mid 2010 was estimated at 6.8 billion.

As population grows then food will need to be produced. Every hectare that is used for coal seam gas mining by way of fenced off gas wells, access roads, pipeline corridors, contaminated water holding ponds and compressor stations is reducing Australia's ability to produce food for both the domestic and overseas markets.

".. many of the coal seam gas deposits occur in areas of high agricultural fertility. This includes the fertile Darling Downs area in Queensland, and the Liverpool Plains in NSW, which comprises only 6% of Australia's total agricultural area but produces over 22% of its food. This is Australia's breadbasket." Tina Hunter, Assistant Professor Bond University.

"All humans need to breathe, eat, and drink, and it's nature that provides us with fresh air, clean water, and the ability to grow food. All humans require a reasonably hospitable climate, and the interconnected web of natural systems regulates the planet's climate and makes life on earth viable. A prime example of this dependence is our reliance on insects for pollination of food crops. Decades ago Albert Einstein reportedly warned 'If the bee disappears from the surface of the earth, man would have no more than four years to live. No more bees, no more pollination, no more plants, no more animals, no more man.' Today there are still no technological alternatives to animal pollinators." Suzuki's Green Guide, David Suzuki and David R. Boyd,2009, p2-3.

Coal Seam Gas exploration, testing and mining has been happening near Chinchilla in Queensland since 2001 and it was only after 60 minutes 14 May 2010 http://sixtyminutes.ninemsn.com.au/article.aspx?id=1052462 and 4 Corners 21 February2011 http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/content/2011/s3141787.htm investigated and reported about the impact of this industry that more people became aware. Then came Gasland – the documentary from the USA filmed by Josh Fox that alerted many to the concerns of many Americans whose lives have been adversely affected. My observation is that if CSG was such an amazingly good energy source then why weren't the Queensland people told about it sooner. I would have thought that the Government would have been telling everyone how great it was. Yet they were remarkably quiet.

Tara residential estates, south of Chinchilla, in south west Queensland looks like a gasfield yet these estates are home to Queenslanders. (See YouTube video Why Tara is Blockading and you get an aerial view of access roads, contaminated holding ponds, pipeline corridors, fenced off gas wells and the destruction of native vegetation)

CSG Mining causes major social impacts:

1.Landholders face the prospect of losing control of their land, and property values are degraded and options for re-sale lost once exploration licences are issued.
2. The social fabric of communities is drastically weakened, with evidence that communities dominated by fly-in/fly-out workers show higher incidence of violence and crime, soaring rents and worsened mental health outcomes.

The rapid expansion the CSG industry looks set to have major economic impacts:

1. Food security is threatened by risks to groundwater and loss of arable land.
2. It is undermining economic diversity and leading to a skills shortage in other rural industries, and can lead to collapse of businesses unable to compete for staff.
3. It is likely to impact negatively on a whole range of other industries such as organic farming, tourism, vineyards and orchards.
4. It leads to important local infrastructure, such as roads, being run-down and damaged at a cost to the taxpayer.

Examples: Food security is threatened by CSG mining proposals on the Liverpool Plains, around Moree and Bellata, and the in Northern Rivers region; pipelines threaten to cause major erosion to self-mulching black soil plains around Mullaley; and CSG mining poses a threat to the vital hot springs tourist attractions from Pilliga to Moree.

Other socio-economic issues with coal seam gas mining include:
1. Royalties paid to the State create an expectation that projects will be approved, whilst failing to deliver sufficient funds to offset the impact of CSG.
2. Local Government and local communities are currently largely excluded from the planning process and public participation and legal standing is inadequate.

If a project is to be sustainable then all three main points of sustainability (Environmental, Economic and Social) must be given the equal recognition they require. A sustainable project is one where all 3 aspects of sustainability are met equally.
http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/sustainability/index.htm
"Sustainable development aims to meet human needs in the present while preserving the environment so that these needs can also be met in the indefinite future."

I am asking the Committee for 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. And also a prohibition on coal seam gas exploration and mining on existing food producing farmland and from all residential areas. To ensure that the community has full legal rights to challenge and enforce environmental laws under which coal seam gas companies are operating. For all CSG mining companies to prove that their project meets all the criteria for what makes a development sustainable.

Terms of Reference 1. The environmental and health impact of CSG activities including the:
d. Effect on Crown Lands including travelling stock routes and State forests

CSG mining represents a major threat to natural areas such as

High conservation value forests like the Pillaga Forest and the World Heritage Border Ranges National Park.

- Even protected areas and public lands are not safe – CSG mining can occur in areas bordering National Parks, and is permitted in State Conservation Areas and State Forests. Examples: Pilliga CSG mining will clear at least 2,400 hectares and fragment 85,000 hectares of public lands, including State Forests and State Conservation Areas; at Putty drilling is planned next to the World Heritage-listed Wollemi NP; at Poggy, drilling is occurring on an inholding in Goulburn River NP; in north-west NSW, Travelling Stock Routes are targeted for drilling and gas pipeline infrastructure; in the north-east, a pipeline is proposed through the World Heritage-listed Border Ranges NP.

"Occupying about 500,000 hectares between the Namoi River in the North and Warrumbungle Ranges in the South, the Pilliga comprises the largest remaining area of native forest west of the Great Divide." "...the Pilliga Forest has been long recognised as one of the most important areas for biodiversity in eastern Australia, home to at least 300 native animal species and over 900 plant species. It is a vast unusual western woodland characterised by native white cypress and iron bark forests, broom bush plains and vivid spring flowers." As stated on the Narrabri website http://www.visitnarrabri.cfm.predelegation.com/index.cfm?page_id=1044&page_name=Pilliga%20Forest

The World Heritage Border Ranges National Park – "A park within the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage Area on the rim of a vast, ancient volcano. Pinnacle Lookout offers views of Wollumbin-Mt Warning, the escarpment and all the way to the coast. The park is a haven to native fauna such as Alberts lyrebird and the pouched frog. It is co-managed under an Indigenous Land Use Agreement with the Githabul people." http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/nationalparks/parkhome.aspx?id=N0050

I am asking the Committee that such places of such high conservation value be excluded from CSG exploration and mining

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

a. Effect on ground and surface water systems,
b. Effects related to the use of chemicals,
c. Effects related to hydraulic fracturing

As we live on the driest habited continent in the world the protection of our surface and underground water is paramount as without water we die. The Great Artesian Basin - http://www.derm.qld.gov.au/factsheets/pdf/water/w68.pdf - the life blood of many rural communities – must retain its integrity.

CSG mining represents a serious threat to water resources due to:

- The location of CSG wells on sensitive floodplains and in water catchments. Examples: Discharge of treated 'waste' water by Eastern Star Gas into a creek in the Pilliga; location of CSG wells on the floodplain at Casino; exploratory drilling near Woronora Dam in water catchment areas of Sydney and the Illawarra; drilling near the Tomago sandbeds water catchment area in the Hunter.

CSG mining produces vast quantities of waste that represent a serious environmental risk:

- Treatment of waste water results in the production of a highly concentrated 'brine' by-product,that is extremely difficult to dispose of without causing harm.
  Examples: Spillage of waste water leading to extensive tree death in the Pilliga; deliberate discharge of saline water leading to pollution event near Broke; native animal deaths at drill ponds in the Pilliga.

ABC Lateline 29 August 2011, Professor Chris Moran University of Queensland, Professor Craig Simmons Flinders University South Australia and Professor Stephen Raine University of Southern Queensland all expressed concerns about the potential cumulative damage to the Great Artesian Basin. It was also noted that not one company report was verified by peer reviewed science. The program raised the issue of salt as a byproduct of CSG mining and in Queensland alone it was stated that 30 million tonnes of salt would be produced in the next 30 years.

How can coal seam gas mining companies promise that their hydraulic fracturing (fracking) chemicals will not poison any aquifer? To date has the GAB aquifer system been mapped?

I am asking the Committee that all coal seam gas mining companies list every chemical to be used in the fracking process and that they must be assessed by the chemical regulator and be proven to be safe and not cause to harm to humans, animals or water or soil.

Terms of Reference 4. The interaction of the Act with other legislation and regulations, including the Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991

Coal seam gas mining is exempt from a number of other environmental statutes, including the Native Vegetation Act 2003 and the Water Management Act 2000. Legislation controlling activities on public lands are inadequate to prevent coal seam gas mining, which when approved effectively privatises public lands. Interaction with Federal legislation at the exploration phase is poorly understood and not enforced – ie extensive exploration without getting Federal approval in the Pilliga.

I am asking the Committee for all CSG exploration and mining to be made subject to all relevant environmental legislation, including the Native Vegetation Act 2003 and the Water Management Act 2000.

Thank you for your consideration