

**Submission
No 555**

INQUIRY INTO COAL SEAM GAS

Organisation: National Parks Association, Illawarra Branch

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NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION OF NSW
protecting nature through community action

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Submission to the NSW Legislative Council General Purpose Standing
Committee No. 5's *Inquiry into Coal Seam Gas*
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National Parks Association of New South Wales Illawarra Branch

President: Graham Burgess
Secretary: Helen Wilson

Authorised by Helen Wilson
14 September 2011

The Illawarra Branch of the NPA has over 130 members and like other branches of the NPA it is engaged in both conservation work and conducting outdoor activities with the aim of fostering appreciation and protection of our natural heritage. The branch has a special interest in the Illawarra Escarpment, which is the focus of this submission.

We note that the NPA has made a submission to the Inquiry and fully endorse that submission.

In the following brief submission we wish to add our concerns regarding the potential impacts of coal seam gas mining on the special environments of the Illawarra region.

THE ILLAWARRA ESCARPMENT AND THE WORONORA PLATEAU

The Illawarra Escarpment is an iconic feature of the Illawarra region, providing a spectacular natural backdrop to the adjacent coastal urban areas. It is located approximately 60 kilometres south of Sydney, and the escarpment extends from Royal National Park south for approximately 50 kilometres. The Woronora Plateau lies above the escarpment and is an important part of the water catchment area for the Sydney area.

Both the escarpment and the Plateau are biodiversity “hot-spots” for plants and wildlife and many of its plant communities are rare or restricted to the Illawarra. There is now an almost continuous conserved corridor of land north to Royal National Park and adjacent to Dharawal State Conservation Area and Dharawal Nature Reserve. This corridor provides opportunities for wildlife refuge as well as ecotourism and should be conserved for future generations.

The National Parks Association of NSW has for some time been advising the government of the need to provide protected connectivity between the current parks and reserves of the area. The recently released video trilogy “The Green Corridors of Southern Sydney” highlights the importance of these areas and the need to provide comprehensive protection and connectivity. Protection is needed to ensure the survival and recovery of endangered species, and secure vegetated connectivity is needed to nurture biodiversity as habitats are displaced by the increasing influence of climate change.

The protected corridor of land is now under threat from coal seam gas mining. Apex Energy NL is currently exploring for coal seam gas in PELs 442 and 444 and has approval to drill exploration boreholes on the Woronora Plateau, including in areas closeto the edge of the Escarpment.



The recent moratorium on mining approvals of the NSW government did not extend retrospectively regarding these approvals. If subsequent production mining were to be permitted it would be disastrous for the ecosystem of the areas. Bushland and trees would be cut down and roads would be built intersecting the area and destroying the wildlife corridors. Heavy machinery and water tankers would be trucked in and out and pollution of the surface water and groundwater are highly likely.

The Illawarra area has been mined extensively for coal for more than 150 years, with underground mining, including longwall mining, running underneath the Escarpment and the Plateau. The environmental impacts have been large, particularly with subsidence causing cracking to riverbeds and surface runoff from coalwash areas. Many boreholes have been drilled and the cumulative effects on the hydrogeology of the region are not well known. However, the surface impacts have been somewhat limited until now. Coal seam gas mining will have heavy surface environmental impacts.

The NPA Illawarra Branch notes that there is currently an exemption on the Royalties paid to the State from coal seam gas mining and no Royalties are payable for the first five years. The anticipated lifetime of a production well is less than 20 years, probably closer to ten years.

We submit that any possible short term economic benefits to society from coal seam gas mining are far outweighed by the risk of highly adverse effects to the special environments of the Illawarra Escarpment and adjacent Woronora Plateau.

We support the recommendations of the NPA NSW submission to this inquiry.

Helen Wilson
Secretary