

Submission
No 231

INQUIRY INTO COAL SEAM GAS

Name: Dr John Williams
Organisation: Natural Resources Commission
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30 August 2011

Ms Beverly Duffy
Director, GPSC 5
Legislative Council, Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Ms Duffy,

Coal seam gas inquiry

This submission is provided in response to a letter dated 23 August 2011 regarding the General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5 inquiry into coal seam gas.

The Natural Resources Commission (NRC) has a general function to provide the Government with independent advice on natural resource management. The NRC has not researched this matter specifically, but I would like to provide some high-level comments.

There is currently a high level of uncertainty about local and cumulative impacts of coal seam gas activities. While knowledge about these impacts is still developing, strong risk management supported by rigorous monitoring and evaluation will be essential. Many impacts may not be evident for a long time, so appropriate monitoring must be in place so that problems can be detected and resolved.

With more knowledge about the benefits and impacts of extraction, planning for any further development in the coal seam gas industry in NSW should be guided by the principles of integrated catchment management. This means that we should take a strategic, regional-scale perspective to plan for this industry considering the cumulative impacts of many projects at a regional scale, not just the impacts of individual projects. We need to understand the impacts of coal seam gas extraction not only on groundwater systems, but also on land resources, biodiversity, other industries, and community aspirations for the future of their landscapes.

Coal seam gas extraction is one industry operating within complex ecological and socio-economic systems that make up the landscapes of NSW. It is critical that we gather the best-available information about the potential impacts of coal seam gas extraction on the possible futures for NSW's landscapes, so the NSW Government can carefully and strategically plan the development of the industry.


John Williams
Commissioner