

**Submission
No 92**

INQUIRY INTO COAL SEAM GAS

Name: Mrs Helen Saville

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My submission is to the Inquiry into Coal Seam Gas. I am a small landholder in the Southern Highlands whose land is not subject to potential exploration at this point. However, the rate of expansion of this industry in this area is such that it is causing widespread concern. Local people are concerned about the potential effects on the environment and the water table, the legal rights of property owners and the inadequacy of compensation from mining companies. In other areas of the state and in Queensland, property owners are finding that their properties become in fact unsaleable if coal seam gas plants are established. The loss of amenity and mobility as well as the threats to health and the resulting anxiety are not compensated for by the relatively low payments made by mining companies to landowners. This is in stark contrast to profits the companies stand to make from an export focused industry. This industry must be slowed down in the public interest and rights of landowners must be strengthened. The companies need to prove that their practices are safe and the preservation of good farmland must take precedence over mining as food security is a higher national interest than mining for export, which is already having a negative effect on other areas of the economy. The moratorium on further mining must be extended to allow for much greater research and community consultation. The royalties paid to the state should not sway decision making and prevent consideration of wider and more long term interests. The exemptions from statutes on native vegetation and surface and underground water must cease and the effective privatisation of public land for mining, as is happening here in Belanglo State Forest, is not acceptable. In addition, legislation is needed to protect productive farmland. Local government needs to be consulted in granting mining approval and consultation needs to be an integral part of the process rather than only considered when the community becomes concerned enough to set up protests. The current situation is totally undemocratic as a public resource is being used to enrich a small number of companies in the face of widespread public disapproval. The NSW Petroleum Act must be reviewed and must be strengthened to reflect the public interest more strongly and to create proper consultation with all who stand to be affected by this and similar industries.