

Submission
No 476

INQUIRY INTO COAL SEAM GAS

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially Confidential

To: Committee;

Impacts of Coal Seam Gas Inquiry

The Director

General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5

Parliament House

Macquarie St, Sydney NSW 2000

7th September, 2011

Please consider my concerns regarding the coal seam gas industry which seems to be expanding at break neck speed.

I am the resident owner of an agricultural property at Baerami, in the Goulburn River Catchment, Upper Hunter Valley area of New South Wales, and hold grave fears for the future sustainability of this and all properties, and business, in the immediate and wider area if the coal seam gas industry is allowed to invade our community.

My concerns are outlined below in accordance with your Terms of Reference

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

a. Effect on ground and surface water systems,

This is my major concern as I do NOT believe it is possible for any CSG mining company or their contractors to adequately ensure and guarantee NO damage will be done to ground and surface water systems or any aquifer.

I have attended many of the information sessions held by, or addressed by, CSG industry representatives. None will GUARANTEE no damage to water systems and UNLIKELY is too great a risk. Their argument that their drilling practices cannot disrupt the water systems are not logical to anyone who has ever drilled a water bore. The opinion the CSG representatives offer is NOT the same as that of independant drilling contractors.

There is already much evidence locally, interstate, & internationally that CGS mining practices have seriously damaged ground and surface water systems.

I have found NO evidence that these systems once impacted can be, or have been, repaired by the perpetrators of the damage.

There is no adequate compensation for disruption to, or loss of, water quality or quantity or reliability.

In this area all water systems are part of and feed the Goulburn River catchment, which in turn is a major contributor to the Hunter River system.

ANY risk to water is TOO great a risk.

Every enterprise and household is totally dependant on the continued availability of the reliable, clean, safe water that is now, and has been since settlement, a feature of this area.

Without this feature ALL agricultural enterprises, the households and businesses that rely on them and thus the wider community WILL fail.

b. Effects related to the use of chemicals,

When ever chemicals are used there is a risk of contamination. Be that by the nature of the chemicals being used or by the manner in which they are used, by accident, equipment failure, human error or malpractice, there is always a risk. The CSG industry use chemicals, some of a highly toxic nature, that could contaminate the soil, water or air. Contamination has occurred at sites in Australia and throughout the world wherever CSG activities exist. Once contaminated how do they fix the problem, can they fix any problem? Any spillage could leach through the soil and contaminate the water table & river catchment system. Any spillage will pollute the air.

These are possibilities I don't want introduced into the area, for myself, my neighbours and future generations to live and work with any consequences.

c. Effects related to hydraulic fracturing,

I believe this practice should be banned on all agricultural and river catchment lands in this or any other area. None of the chemicals usually employed in this process are environmentally or human friendly.

Chemical residues have been found in areas where CSG companies deny any chemical use.

Any effect of the process itself is difficult to predict or manage. The risk of disturbing or contaminating the water systems are real and should be avoided.

Any gas leakage poses a threat to air quality, the environment in general and humans and livestock.

Placing any number of consent conditions regarding the use of chemicals or the manner in which hydraulic fracturing may be undertaken is a pointless exercise unless those conditions can be monitored and enforced. In practice this will not happen.

Then there are practical aspects of concern regarding the process involved.

Where are the vast amounts of water used in this process coming from? The landowners water supply?

Does the CSG company truck in their own water? From what water source, where and how far away?

How is the used water, once recovered, disposed of? This water will be saline, contaminated by the coal and gas it has passed through, and if chemicals have been employed it will be toxic.

Will it be trucked out to dispose of elsewhere?

Where and at what risk of contamination at that site or in transit?

Vast numbers of heavy vehicular movements throughout the district pose enormous added risk of accident to locals using the roads, which in the main are not suited to heavy traffic. If there is an accident resulting in spillage there will be contamination of the area, without doubt.

If not trucked out what will be done with this contaminated water? On ground storage measures all pose serious risk of contamination to the environment, the soil, air and our water systems. Dams in this area are notorious for 'not holding', they leak. Perhaps a dam could be lined to prevent leakage but in times of heavy rainfall dams overflow or in flood they are swamped, liners fail. There will be contamination. The risks involved with CSG mining are considerable and all frightening.

d. Effect on Crown Lands including travelling stock routes and State forests,

This area is surrounded by the Wollemi & Goulburn River National Parks.

Wollemi National Park is part of the World Heritage Listed Greater Blue Mountains National Park.

Bylong Valley Way, the ONLY traffic route, is part of the The Greater Blue Mountains Touring Route and adjacent is Section 9 of the Bicentennial National Trail. All are promoted locally, nationally and internationally for their scenic and environmental attributes. ALL are major attractions in this area. The visitors to and through these unique places add to the viability of many local enterprises. Any disruption to the scenic nature of the area will certainly have a negative impact on businesses involved in any way with Tourism, and will change the amenity of the local community.

CSG mining activities in proximity to the National Parks, the Touring Route or the Bicentennial National Trail would certainly reduce their value & use. High traffic rates, particularly of heavy vehicles, are not conducive to any Tourist activity, or Tourism related enterprise, nor are they conducive to the peace and tranquility of the area, the health, wellbeing and peace of mind of the community and are dangerous to wildfire which abound in this area.

By Law NO mining is allowed in the Wollemi National Park. Can CSG companies ensure that their activities do not cause or allow extraction of gas from the Park. Considering the close proximity of the Park throughout the area I doubt CSG activities could avoid extracting gas from the Park, placing themselves in breach of the Law. Can CSG companies guarantee their activities will have NO negative impact on the environment that may affect the National Parks?

Travelling Stock Routes, run throughout the Bylong Valley Way and each road that branches from it, the branch road Routes are used regularly for stock movements.

These Routes would be very dangerous to use were the roads subject to numerous heavy vehicle movements. CSG activity cannot occur without numerous heavy vehicle movements.

e. Nature and effectiveness of remediation required under the Act,

I don't know the requirements of the Act, so cannot comment. I do know that damage to the water system can't be remediated effectively.

f. Effect on greenhouse gas and other emissions,

CSG mining activities require and generate enormous numbers of vehicular movements. Mainly heavy vehicles. Much of their machinery runs on diesel generators. Their activity must add to carbon emissions & certainly adds to air pollution anywhere in their vicinity.

More pollution over the life of the project, in the quest of a supposedly cleaner fuel.

I don't see the logic.

g. Relative air quality and environmental impacts compared to alternative fossil fuels.

All fossil fuel extraction activities negatively impact the environment in general and everything unfortunate enough to live in close proximity in particular.

The question should be "Why expand these activities at all" not which relatively is better. None are sustainable or environmentally friendly.

2. The economic and social implications of CSG activities including those which affect:

a. Legal rights of property owners and property values,

As best as I can determine I have few rights as a property owner in regard to CSG activities.

I can negotiate an access agreement but I cannot deny access.

I don't wish to live amidst CSG activities, but I have no right to refuse or stop CSG activity on my property. CSG activity will negatively impact my property, my ability to earn my living as I see fit, the environment in which I live, every aspect of my life.

CSG companies have no obligation to purchase my property should I wish to sell. I am advised that property values will decline by at least 30% if CSG Mining establishes in this area. I am advised that it will be very hard to sell now as the threat of CSG mining coming to the area is already widely touted.

Property values have slumped in other areas where CSG mining is establishing.

It is quite simply WRONG that the laws of the land allow this to happen, and that legislators encourage an activity that has this effect.

b. Food security and agricultural activity,

Agricultural and mining activities are NOT compatible. We can and will survive without CSG, we cannot survive without clean, safe, reliable water systems. CSG activities pose a threat of disruption and/or contamination to the water systems that sustain us, the land that grows our crops and houses our livestock. The risk cannot be managed, any damage cannot be undone. CSG activities should NOT be approved on agricultural lands or water catchment areas.

There should be vast mandatory buffer zones around agricultural lands, water courses, wetlands and all water catchment land, creeks, streams and rivers.

Vast because CSG activities can mine horizontally underground for 5 or more kilometres, at a depth of many hundreds of metres. How can they predict what action or reaction will occur, what damage will be done? I don't believe they can. Water sources need protection from any possible damage.

Agriculture is a challenging occupation always, yet essential to meet the food needs of our population into the future. Agricultural lands should be protected, and the farmers who work them encouraged rather than dismayed by ever increasing threats to their livelihoods. Agricultural production is vital to the Australian economy and should be considered as such. I consider CSG exploration, mining and extraction as a distinct threat to agricultural production.

c. Regional development, investment and employment, and State competitiveness,

Development should have some balance, expansion of some industries, in this area mining industries, at the expense of all others removes any balance and is to the detriment of the community as a whole. What is the point to encouraging investment and employment in one sector, when that removes investment and employment from all other sectors within the area. The introduction of CSG mining into this area, already being rapidly overrun by normal coal mining, threatens the expansion, possibly even the continuance, of our world class Thoroughbred Breeding enterprises, wineries and viticulture, dairying, beef cattle and all other agricultural enterprises and tourism ventures and the businesses that support them. The investment and employment provided by all those activities outweighs that of the proposed CSG activities and is sustainable into the future. These enterprises benefit the local community, Australian taxpayers, their profits stay here. The same cannot be said for the majority of profits of CSG mining enterprises. Our community will continue to grow and develop and sustain those that live here into the future without CSG activity OR it may not survive CSG activity to have a future.

d. Royalties payable to the State,

I don't believe this should be a priority in determining the future of our community, no royalties will be spent here or benefit the community here.

The State should be actively pursuing the development of truly sustainable, environmentally friendly, renewable technologies which pose NO risk to the health and wellbeing of Australians, our water systems or agricultural lands. These things will bring benefit to the State coffers into the future.

CSG mining is NOT sustainable into the future.

e. Local Government including provision of local/regional infrastructure and local planning control mechanisms.

According to our local Mayor, local government has little to no say in planning and approvals relating to CSG activities. These are now State government responsibilities. I don't believe that policy is in the best interest of this, or any, community. It will be the local government that will need to find the funds for repair to local roads, their staff that will deal with concerns and complaints from residents. They are aware of local conditions, requirements and concerns. They should have input to all planning control mechanisms.

3. The role of CSG in meeting the future energy needs of NSW including the:
- a. Nature and extent of CSG demand and supply,
 - b. Relative whole-of-lifecycle emission intensity of CSG versus other energy sources,
 - c. Dependence of industry on CSG for non-energy needs (eg. chemical manufacture),
 - d. Installed and availability costs of CSG versus other stationary energy sources,
 - e. Proportion of NSW energy needs which should be base load or peaking supply and the extent to which CSG is needed for that purpose,
 - f. Contribution of CSG to energy security and as a transport fuel.

I am not qualified to comment on much of the above, the CSG company representatives in this area have said they are expecting to export 100% of the gas they produce. That being the case I see zero benefit of any CSG activity in this area in relation to the energy needs of NSW.

It is my opinion that developing truly sustainable and environmentally friendly resources will better serve NSW and Australia into the future.

Solar, particularly for regional, rural and remote communities, should be further developed as a matter of urgency and poses NO threat to our water systems, agricultural lands, National Parks, sensitive habitats and species, nor to people. Hydro power has served NSW well, why have no new hydro ventures been developed? The NSW northern rivers area is suitable for such a development.

All more sustainable renewable technologies should be fully investigated in preference to the introduction of CSG activities in agricultural and water catchment or groundwater dependant areas.

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

I am told that the Act allows exemption from Fire Regulations to the CSG mining industry.

That is WRONG and should be rectified immediately.

The activities of CSG mining and the nature of the gases involved pose a real and constant fire threat at ALL times. They should NOT be exempt from any fire regulations anywhere, and particularly not in this area where the topography of narrow valleys surrounded by mountainous terrain and densely wooded National Parks makes fire control difficult and hazardous to all involved. As an active member of our local Bush Fire Brigade, and a bushfire fighter of 30 years experience, I am well aware of the dangers of bushfires, and in this area how unpredictable and difficult to control they can be and are. All fire regulations and restrictions, that come into place from time to time, apply to every member of the community and with good reason. CSG mining activities WILL greatly increase the possibility of bushfires in this area and the risk to properties far removed from their immediate location. Any fire that reaches the National Parks has the ability to decimate thousands of hectares before it comes under control, as I have witnessed in the past. It won't be the staff or employees of CSG companies at risk firefighting. It WILL be volunteers, mainly farmers like myself, members of local Bush Fire Brigades. And NO thanks will be forthcoming from CSG companies for our efforts. It is LUDICROUS that any Act or legislation would exempt CSG mining from fire regulations and the Act or Legislation should be amended as a matter of urgency.

The Act also allows CSG mining applications to be approved without the consultation or approval of other regulatory bodies and legislations. Previously these applications would have been subject to scrutiny and approval by numerous departments.

5. The impact similar industries have had in other jurisdictions.

There is ample evidence interstate and internationally that CSG mining poses risk to the environment and the quality of life of communities wherever it becomes established. There is evidence that that property values have been adversely effected in CSG mining areas in Queensland.

I appreciate the opportunity to make this submission to the Committee and hope you will consider my concerns.

I resent that in order to write this submission in an attempt to protect my property, lifestyle and livelihood from CSG mining I have had to become an advocate, to spend many hours reading and studying in fields well removed from my area of expertise. I resent the disruption to my normal work and routine caused by the necessity to attend numerous hours of meetings and information sessions, to become informed about CSG mining. An industry I have NO interest in, that offers NO benefit to me or the community in which I live. An industry that poses RISKS to my health and wellbeing and that of the environment and our community. I resent the fact that I have NO right to deny access to my property, NO power to stop an industry I believe to be dangerous and totally unsuited to this area. An industry that I DO NOT believe can be trusted to act in a truthful, ethical, and responsible manner.

I ask that you proceed in your deliberations with great caution, that you recommend and ensure that the forecast Strategic Land Use Policy include that agricultural lands and water catchment areas, rivers, watercourses and wetlands will be excluded from areas where CSG mining activities are allowed, and that mandatory buffer zones around those lands and areas are sufficiently wide to ensure CSG mining activities can NOT impact those crucial areas, and that the Strategic Land Use Policy must be applied to all CSG mining activities.

You have the power and abilities not available to me, you have the opportunity to ensure CSG mining activities CAN NOT adversely impact agricultural lands and water catchment areas.

Please act to protect these areas and the communities reliant on them, in doing so you can achieve what I can only hope to influence.

Yours faithfully,