

**Submission  
No 173**

## **INQUIRY INTO COAL SEAM GAS**

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Dear Sir/Madam,

I try to do my best to protect the environment, I recycle, use only tank water and don't waste electricity, but I am a hypocrite because I do occasionally use cling wrap and aluminium foil. I drive a car using petrol and oil. I use electricity at home. I sometimes buy bottled water. I try to give my family good healthy food, but sometimes we eat lollies, chips, store bought cake and biscuits.

But I am not stupid. I know when to draw the line.

I have done a bit of research on the coal seam gas mining industry and attended some community meetings. I have seen and heard first-hand how honest farming people have had their land appropriated, drilling rigs, roads and infrastructure built on them, with big trucks and condenser stations and noise pollution; pretty much making their lives a living hell. They must live with large waste pollution ponds exposed to the elements, to seep back into the land and water and to evaporate into the air.

Their land is worthless to sell. Who would want to live on a dump site with drilling rigs as your view?

It is an undisputable fact that our underground and aboveground water is connected. If our water is poisoned with toxic waste chemicals from the coal gas seam mining process it will seep back into the

ground and into the water table and also wash into the land itself and will also evaporate into our skies and come back down that way as well.

Poisoning of the water/land we live on will lead to poisoning of human beings, livestock, domestic animals and flora.

Also I have concerns that the actual physical fracturing of the land itself to extract things from it is a dangerous process for the structural strength and integrity of our land in the long term. When we undermine the earth's crust we invite natural catastrophes such as earthquakes. Earthquakes may be 'natural', but they may not be caused by natural means as we all know that humans are to blame in part for the climate crisis we currently have on our hands.

The coal gas seam industry seems to be an extension of this. In Western society we once allowed industry to poison the air, water and land in the past, we all know of those horrific photos of large monstrous factories billowing black smoke into the atmosphere. The coal gas seam industry seems to have insidiously made its way onto our lands, first in America, where many farmers and small towns have been exploited and ruined; they can no longer drink their own water supplies and it must be shipped from elsewhere at great cost, and there are reports that they are grappling with brain tumours, cancers, headaches, dizzy spells and bloody noses. There is an American movie named Gaslands created to expose this.

In Australia we have a chance to stop it before too much damage is done – the problem is the mining industry is so closely associated with governments, budgeting, bank balances, taxes, international relations, jobs and big, big money that we have got a really big problem. We have environmental, health, moral and social responsibility to protect our land, water, flora, fauna and people. This is difficult because we, the common people of Australia, concerned about our land, our lives and our future are fighting money, power, desire for energy, big business and government to protect our basic human right for fresh clean water, air, land and thus health.

I can see that the farmer's land and water supplies are not only being ruined by poisons used in the coal seam gas mining process (and at the very least potentially ruined), but their land loses much value because who would want to buy land with big drilling rigs, massive roads and infrastructure, huge tankers and road trucks and the constant fear of gas leakages, constant noise, potential explosions and toxic emissions on your doorstep. I don't understand how they have no choice in the matter – if the top of the land is the farmers, why are trucks and drilling stations allowed on the top of the land? Surely this is the farmer's right to say no to such atrocities. I think that those who work in the coal seam gas mining field would not want this done to their families or their own personal land (not without a lot of monetary compensation trading hands – and even then many farmers actually love their land, no amount of money would see them trash it).

We all know that we cannot eat or drink poison. This is the key to this whole debate. Not even the miners would drink the water in Gaslands, though they were telling one young man that his mother should drink it, that it was still safe.

It is not safe.

We shouldn't even be having this debate. There is no safe way to dispose of unsafe chemicals at all. Even if you put them in anti leak canisters and buried them for centuries at some stage they have to leak, break down, and will get back into our oceans and land.

I haven't even mentioned the proposed ports that will be built on the coastline of Australia to store and haul the gas offshore to countries like China. There will most likely be untold damage to a certain species of turtle whose breeding sites just happen to be where the ports will be and to precious dugong sanctuaries. These ports will be close to the Great Barrier Reef and to other wildlife heritage listed sites. We all know there are great risks involved to the storage of flammable fuels. We watched in horror as BP defiled the Gulf of Mexico coastline, killed people and animals, polluted the ocean with untold consequences, lasted 3 long months and to date is the largest accidental

marine oil spill in history. And not to forget the recent Japanese earthquakes, tsunami and the ensuing nuclear meltdown – we are at the mercy of nature and it, it seems, is at the mercy of us.

Our country will be pilfered and our land will be poisoned. We will be sick. We will need extra healthcare, on an already pressured and inefficient health care system.

The effects of our behaviour cannot always be seen instantaneously. Sometimes it takes years for something to become evident, for negative effects to be seen (like thalidomide and birth defects for example). Also we must keep in mind that there will be many years of environmental venting of these toxic waters, 'produced water', i.e. a dangerous chemical compound of toxic waste, in large amounts on a regular basis, we are talking what I think will be millions of tonnes of waste here - a colossal amount of waste product. This amount of toxin over such a long time can only be a cause of great concern.

If one product such as thalidomide can lead to such horrific birth defects, then I just ask that we use our common sense and consider what this cocktail of coal gas seam chemicals will do to us, to our world, to our future. Our health is at great risk - the health of our families, our children and our grandchildren and beyond.

Coal gas seam companies might think they can contain the waste. They might think they are just doing a few thousand drilling rigs here and there, a few thousand stagnant waste ponds on land that doesn't matter to them, that hasn't been in their family for generations or that they have purchased and can now do with as they please. But everything is interconnected, the land, water, sea, sky. We are all a part of one big ecosystem. We all know that those who study weather patterns look across the whole world, as well as across time, simultaneously.

The coal gas seam companies want to extract gas for energy that humans consume. However this is being done at a great expense and I am not talking about money, that we were not aware of when they started. The people of this country did not choose this. The government who is voted in by the

people chose this because of international energy demands and the monetary gains from these projects. Now that the people have caught onto this, now that the farmers have a voice, and now that we know it is not clean energy (like they would like us to believe in their expensive squeaky clean ad campaign), I think there is a lot of cleaning up to do. Farmers need to be compensated. Wrongs need to be righted. Land and water already contaminated need to be treated carefully. No more 'treated' i.e. polluted water should make its way into fresh water catchments, rivers, creeks, dams, etc; this is absolutely not acceptable in any shape or form and should stop immediately.

Although I rent on beautiful farming land I am not a farmer. But the landowner loves this land, it has been in his family for generations and I care deeply for and value his land and the water that I get from my tank. I am not on town supply water. I value our creeks and our rivers where we swim on hot weekends all over Australia. I grow organic lettuce in my back garden. I want to know the water falling from the sky or that runs off the ground is safe so this lettuce that feeds my family stays organic and stays uncontaminated – a basic right which I am sure many other farmers and home gardener's (which by the way Australian government has been promoting so strongly in recent years because of food miles etc.) feel strongly about also.

I could look up all the statistics for all of this, tonnage of waste that will be put into our waterways and land, the amount and number of drilling sites currently in operation and those that are planned, etc, but the National Toxic Network and other organisations will do all this.

What I do is plead to reason. I am a writer. What I do is write and try to get people to see the heart of the matter. I am aware we can't just shut down everything tomorrow, that there is a complex world out there and subtext exists that I am not aware of. I am aware that the government must show sensitivity to the mining companies and overseas interests which are our countries bread and butter, but I am also aware that we cannot stand by and be poisoned and have our land and water poisoned. (Thus I have included the Appendix to state more specifically what needs to be addressed in the coal seam gas industry.)

We can learn from our past mistakes, in this situation it is not too late. We caught this process early when we realised that land and water were being poisoned, and that the industry did not have appropriate (acceptable) regulations particularly for their waste management practices. Sometimes prevention is the only weapon we have, there is no cure once we defile our land and our water and people's health is compromised, lives are lost and their land is worthless, useless and potentially toxic.

I personally know a highly respected Native American Elder and Indian Medicine Woman named Nancy Maryboy. When I told her what was happening here she told me that her people are very upset by what has happened to their land in America because of fracking, she was so sad that it was happening here too. She said they are banding together against it and that in many parts of their country it is too late, the damage has been done and is irreversible. She said it will take centuries for the land to be reusable if ever and the water will never be usable again. She said the movie Gaslands is making a big impact over there now and a large movement is starting to make big waves politically over there, unfortunately a little too late for many people and for portions of the land. I am sure there are issues with this movie, it is fallible, it was made by a human after all. But it does show human suffering that could have been prevented and I think it is a forewarning for Australia.

Other countries in the world have banned and/or are investigating coal seam gas mining procedures. We cannot be left with a desolate wasteland. In Australia we have a lot of country in drought, our water is precious, fertile land equates to feeding ourselves. The desecration of the land and water from which we eat and drink is the act of fools or madmen and women. This process can be stopped before it is too late. We can retract what has been done and prevent further pollution and poisoning in our country. We are at that crossroads right now, an important intersection in decision making for the good of all for the future or for the benefit of a few for a short time with dire consequences for health and longevity.

I was born in Australia, but my grandparents were from Malaysia and Java, and in my family, story telling is an important part of our culture; it helps us learn and grow from our mistakes (much like why we study history). There is an important relevant story about a Hungarian Doctor Ignaz Philipp Semmelweis (July 1, 1818 – August 13, 1865) who first discovered that puerperal fever, often fatal, was being passed on in obstetrical clinics because doctors did not disinfect/wash their hands (particularly after doing autopsies with infected deceased patients). Women were dying several days after giving birth because the germ was being passed onto them through the examinations during labour. His theory was rejected at first. His colleagues did not agree with him, in fact many were offended at his suggestion that they should wash their hands. Prevention, clean hands, would have saved countless lives. Prevention is the only cure here. It was only many years after his death, with the acceptance of germ theory, that doctors finally accepted Semmelweis's premise. When we look back a century later we think how dim witted they must have been, how ignorant.

In a hundred years what will be written about this? It could be a disaster or it could be prevented. Could clean hands be a metaphor for clean lands, clean water? Could it be that history has something to teach us here and something that we must learn from *before* lives are lost and the water and land perhaps irreversibly polluted? I have a vested interest in the future of our society as a whole, not just the monetary side. I am sure most people would say the same.

We can use windmill energy, solar energy, we can make sure every family has safe tank water in places where rainfall is high. In North Qld where they receive tropical rains all year they are still paying for their water! We are not so desperate for energy that we need to destroy our land for energy sources that are natural but not being extracted by natural means and that, once used, are non-renewable. Moreover, as I mentioned previously, perhaps the gas itself is important to the stability of our land mass, why else would the earth store it so carefully in the coal seam in the first place?



Our country and our farmers should not be at a loss, should not suffer dire environmental, health and safety costs to meet international energy needs.

We, the people of Australia, trust our government to care for us as a people. That includes our land and water supplies, our health and our long term well being. Please ensure that the fracking process is put to an end, there must be safer alternatives than using known chemical toxins to extract the gas; and if we must continue with it and please ensure that this industry is highly regulated and carefully controlled, our future depends on it.

Yours sincerely,

Amanda McHugh