

**Submission
No 172**

**INQUIRY INTO PERFORMANCE OF THE NSW
ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION AUTHORITY**

Name: Ms Clarissa Watson

Date received: 30/08/2014

To the parliamentary committee enquiring into the performance of the Environmental Protection Authority

Dear Sirs and Mesdames

I wish to make a brief submission regarding the the performance of the Environmental Protection Authority.

In 2003 it was estimated that NSW had at least 30,000 sites of industrial contamination^[1]. At that time there was no registration system for contaminated sites. Now there is, however by 2014 in NSW only 1087 notifications had been received from owners or occupiers of sites by the Environmental Protection Agency^[2].

Clearly the system by which owners of the site notify the EPA of contamination is seriously inadequate and the EPA needs to take a more proactive role to monitor industrial activity and enforce compliance.

In NSW despite there being as yet very little coal seam gas production there have already been significant environmental breaches including the Eastern Star Pilliga incident in 2010, the Camden AGL air monitoring reporting breaches over the period 2009 to 2012 and Metgasco's illegal disposal of excess produced water into the Casino sewage treatment plant. These breaches were not reported by the operators.

The federal government has divested many of the federal environmental safeguards to the states, and the EPA will be responsible for monitoring industries such as the coal seam gas industry and enforcing breaches. There is little understanding of the science of groundwater and toxic spills and accidents have already been characteristic of this industry. The EPA has failed in its duties already despite the industry being relatively small as yet in NSW. The fines have been woefully inadequate. Eg \$1500 for contaminating ground water with radioactive substances and other toxins.

The NSW government placed a moratorium on csg mining in water catchment areas until the NSW Government Chief Scientist could report on the issues raised. Her final report is expected in the next few months, however in 2013 she issued an interim report. However following a meeting between Mr McFarlane and Premier Baird in the last few days it appears that the caution of the NSW government is being thrown out the window, with media reports indicating that the water catchment and agricultural protections that were in place in relation to csg mining are about to be thrown out without waiting for the Chief Scientist's final report.

The Chief Scientist's initial report stated: "...a full picture of all incidents has not, to date, been made clear."

Therefore not only is the science relating to the environmental damage and water impacts unknown but the regulatory and compliance measures in place are rudimentary, inadequate and ineffective and are ignored by the companies already operating in NSW, despite the industry being of a small size that should be able to be easily be monitored. To allow this industry to grow when even the small existent NSW industry is not adequately monitored and is not compliant will lead to widespread destruction of the environment.

In July 2013 the NSW Chief Scientist released her initial report on Coal Seam Gas extraction in NSW and her final report is due in the next few months. In her introduction she wrote:

...challenges relating to long-term and cumulative environmental impacts are less obvious and require a commitment to significant and ongoing research, as well as a consequent evolution of engineering practice...

and she calls for

“...further research on the unanswered questions around the science of CSG...A commitment to sound policy implementation based on highly developed data and further research to fill the knowledge gaps will be essential...”

...there are still significant studies in progress examining the impacts of unconventional gas extraction on health and the environment...”

The public cannot have confidence in the EPA until it actually starts to do its job and acts as an independent entity. Currently it appears to be a side kick of the politicians and the interests of their coal and industry political donors and cronies.

Thank you

Clarissa K Watson BA, Dip Ed, LLM