

**Submission
No 10**

INQUIRY INTO COAL SEAM GAS

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I wish to express my deep concern over the current proliferation of the coal seam gas mining industry, both in our area (the Northern Rivers region of NSW) and in Australia generally. I am well aware that the industry argues that its curtailment impacts on the potential for shared communal wealth and improved power supply; however, I believe that its arguments are invalid in a world whose understanding and values in relation to its priorities are rapidly changing.

First, I wish to point out that it is a major concern amongst the Australian population generally that the government address the issues of climate change and the supply of energy which contributes to it. **Coal seam gas does not provide a clean energy supply.** My understanding is that methane contributes substantially to the greenhouse gas footprint of shale gas on shorter time scales, dominating it on a 20-year time horizon. The footprint for shale gas is greater than that for conventional gas or oil when viewed on any time horizon, but particularly so over 20 years. **Compared to coal, the footprint of shale gas is at least 20% greater and perhaps more than twice as great on the 20-year horizon and is comparable when compared over 100 years.**

Given Australia's recent experiences with drought, fires and flooding, which correlate with the predicted outcomes of climate change, I submit that any technology – including that of coal seam gas mining – which increases our carbon footprint, and therefore the likelihood

of even worse climate change, is detrimental to our future, both environmentally and economically.

Secondly, I am concerned about the impact of coal seam gas mining on our collective health. Reports from various countries indicate that the quantity and quality of the water supply – whether from rivers or groundwater – has been severely compromised as a result of coal seam gas mining. Given that we live in a largely arid continent, and that we are dependent on regions such as ours for the water which is fundamental to the health, well-being and food supply of our nation, I do not believe that we can afford the risk of an adverse impact on our water. Insufficient data is available about our aquifers and the potential impact of coal seam gas mining on them, and until such time as this data is available and accessible to all interested parties, we are not in a position to make an informed decision with regard to the safety of CSG mining operations.

Thirdly, I have grave misgivings about the ethics of mining companies having the legal right to explore and mine where they will, be it on private farming properties or elsewhere. We live in a society where land-use is zoned to optimize the health and well-being of our citizens and the efficiency of our enterprises, yet it appears that mining companies potentially have the right to destroy the productive and aesthetic appeal of an area. Surely every citizen and every community should have the right to decide whether or not they wish to have a mining enterprise undertake activity on or near their property, and to be fully informed about the factors relevant to their decision. The provision of this information should be overseen by government authorities so that it is open and balanced, and dominated by neither the interests of the mining companies, the propaganda of certain environmental organizations, nor the whims of the government of

the time. At present, this is clearly not the case: public meetings in our region have left attendees dissatisfied with the amount of information that is being provided by coal seam gas mining companies such as Metgasco.

Fourthly, coal seam gas mining is likely to have a negative impact on the economic and environmental well-being of our region. I am deeply, deeply concerned over current plans to mine coal seam gas in our area and to build a pipeline to transport it through the Border Ranges. This is a precious world-heritage listed area and, even now, a failing bastion of our native biodiversity. **We simply cannot afford to risk the further degradation of our biodiversity by the potential damage caused by the construction and possible subsequent negative impacts of a pipeline through the region.** Furthermore, this region is highly dependent on tourism, with its beautiful coastline, attractive agricultural hinterland and the national parks in its mountainous regions. Coal seam gas mining fragments the landscape's beauty, and is likely to negatively impact on regional income through tourism.

My husband recently returned from a business trip which involved travelling around the south-eastern quarter of Queensland; and he repeatedly heard local people lamenting the impact of coal seam gas mining on their landscape. This impact can easily be illustrated by using Google Earth and zooming in on the forested areas west of Dalby, where a spider-web of impacted areas fragments the landscape. I beg you to act to ensure that this does not become our lament as well.

No doubt the advocates of coal seam gas mining will present the enquiry with dire warnings of what would happen if this industry is not allowed to proceed. However, **I urge the Inquiry to listen to such warnings with an open mind and with the use of lateral thinking.**

Rather than accepting that our energy-hungry society must be fed in order to continue on its present trajectory, we would do better to change our thinking and our behaviours in order to bring about the development of a healthier society and world. It would be far more efficacious and beneficial if the government were to invest in the research and development of renewable energy resources, and to develop effective campaigns and strategies to encourage the population to minimize its energy use.

Such campaigns (such as the TV ads featuring black balloons to represent energy consumption) have, so far, done little more than pay lip-service to this concept. What we need is to generate a public acceptance that we do not need to live in such enormous houses and to constantly operate lights, appliances and air-conditioners....a campaign aimed at encouraging people to wear thermal underwear and jumpers rather than turn on heaters, businesses to turn off lighting and minimize air-conditioning, and our whole society to value its water supply (the most fundamental and precious resource we have, yet the most taken for granted!) and the soils and native flora and fauna which, by virtue of their role in the web of life on which our food chain depends, are fundamental to our health and wealth.

Earlier this year, my husband and I put solar panels on our roof. Our action belies the claim made by the Premier and various others that such an action was the prerogative of only wealthy people, and that meanwhile the 'battlers' had to endure rising energy costs. We are far from wealthy, our household income approximating only \$70,000 p.a., and we borrowed money to install our solar panels. Yet it has been a worthwhile investment, and, on balance, our contribution towards the public consumption of coal-fired power is now negligible. Surely the government could encourage such use of renewable technologies, rather than promote ongoing consumption of non-renewable power.

We need to foster an understanding and appreciation of our interdependence, and a prioritization of the factors that impact on the well-being of the whole, rather than continue to promote the concepts associated with individual gain and competition for dollars and resources. **With such an understanding and appreciation, it is clear that coal seam gas mining is a detrimental operation. We have a moral obligation to ourselves and the generations which will follow us to halt it and to instead find alternatives to this industry.**