

Submission
No 266

INQUIRY INTO COAL SEAM GAS

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To: The Director

General Purpose Standing Committee No 5

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As a farmer concerned about the impacts of CSG development in our state my points are simple but crucial to be heard by the government that is supposed to be regulating this industry. Regulating so that CSG does not have a negative impact on the environment and the rest of society concerned.

Think for a minute about the impact of pulling 6 to 8 tonnes of salt out of the earth in every megalitre of extracted water, and the effect it will have on the environment. Especially important to consider when the coal seam companies themselves say that they don't have an adequate way of disposing of it. Allowing this brine to sit in ponds until the next flood washes it across our landscape, sterilising all the ground in its path is unacceptable. This has already happened in the Pilliga at Eastern Star Gas sites. This is only one reason why this industry cannot coexist in the complex and fragile agricultural environment, that is suited to producing food for the nations population. Not only will this salt contaminate this productive farming soil, it would also leach into the natural waterways and then into the sub artesian water supply. **OUR DRINKING WATER!**

Secondly it needs to be outlined to those government representatives that have not had any first hand experience or knowledge of growing crops that putting a methane gas producing well within a paddock would have an extremely debilitating effect on the methodology of crop production. For example, last year the 2010 wheat harvest was one of the wettest harvests on record resulting in many lost crops. This failed crop had to be burnt to allow for machinery to pass over and plant the next years crop. If there is a gas well in these paddocks farmers will not be able to burn weather damaged crops, hence restricting our ability to grow food.

If CSG companies want to put a network of gravel roads across our fields, for all weather access, these built up roads will hold water back on our paddocks disallowing runoff in wet times. When the CSG companies have finished extracting the gas in 30 years, [estimated time of production] farmers will be left with a network of roads covered by gravel that will never be able to be restored to original condition. Gravel cannot ever be fully extracted out of black clay soil and gravel does not grow healthy crops. We will be left with an industrial wasteland.

When the CSG have finished taking what they want in a short 30 years (in comparison my family has been farming in the Wee Waa area for 135 years consecutively) who will be responsible for maintaining all of the defunct well heads? Will the government ensure that they remain in a secure state, free of contaminating the land and residents who will be living there long after the CSG companies have gone? What about beneath the surface? Will there NEVER EVER be connectivity between aquifers as the CSG companies claim? Are we to place the future of our food growing regions in the hands of CSG companies that make these claims when all that they want is to make millions of dollars profit by pulling methane gas out of the ground?

This industry is a step in the wrong direction for the states future energy supply. Lets get real, lets get renewable. Solar energy is renewable and I have personally heard many farmers say that they would be more than willing to allocate some of their land for the installation of solar panels to supply to the grid. This would be a much better approach to the energy issue rather than the continued reliance on a resource that is not renewable.

A complete ban on the industry is critical if our environment and livelihood of people are to prosper. Do not deny people the right to fresh, clean water and the availability of food.

If a complete ban on the industry is cutting back the revenue for the state too much, then at least a moratorium on the industry so that independent scientific research into the effects of the practices of CSG extraction can take place is essential. This would include investigating and regulating how excessively salty water is disposed of, even after the reverse osmosis process is performed. This process does not dissolve the salt, it just reduces the volume of salty water to a more concentrated, more toxic form.

If the government still insists on allowing CSG extraction in this state, then give landholders the democratic right to have a say about what happens on the land that they have earned through working their guts out. That is their democratic right to say NO if they so desire. If any amendments to legislation need to be made to allow this then so be it. This could mean that if a landholder was for CSG extraction then they could make arrangements with CSG companies to drill on their land. The landholders who want it can have it and the landholders who don't want it would not have to have it. A fair outcome for both parties.

Angus Hamilton