



Submission from United Myall Residents Against Gas Extraction
Charlie Shuetrim to: csg.review

24/04/2013 01:05 PM

History:

This message has been replied to and forwarded.

Dear Professor O'Kane

Please find attached our submission to your independent review of coal seam gas activities in New South Wales.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can provide any further assistance.

With best wishes

Charlie Shuetrim
(Tel: 0416-215-251)



NSW Chief Scientist 2013-04-24 submission.pdf

UNITED MYALL RESIDENTS AGAINST GAS EXTRACTION

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24th April 2013

Professor Mary O’Kane
NSW chief Scientist and Engineer.

Dear Professor O’Kane

Thank you for the opportunity of making this submission to your independent review of coal seam gas activities in NSW. We note that the focus of this review is on the impacts of these activities on human health and the environment. This submission is made on behalf of the residents of the Myall Lakes area.

CURRENT STATUS

We believe that the current situation is entirely unsatisfactory.

- The CSG companies are in a rush to exploit demand for CSG. They are focused only on their short term profits.
- The Government is in a rush to get the royalties from CSG.
- There is widespread acknowledgement that much research still needs to be done in relation to CSG.
- CSG companies are ambushing the Government with mountains of paperwork prepared by their consultants. The Government does not have the quantity or quality of resources to evaluate these reports properly. The consultants preparing the reports are skilled at making them draw the conclusions that are sought by their masters who are paying their fees.
- The Government has abandoned the Precautionary Principle and is enchanted by Adaptive Management. This is entirely inappropriate when we are talking about long term impacts on the environment and human health.
- As recently as last Friday (19th April) the NSW Government published a new protocol allowing mining companies to request a “site verification” of sensitive land. This opens the gate to a reclassification of this land, leading to less rigorous testing for any environmental damage. It is just one more example of the Government leaning over backwards in its efforts to get the royalties from the CSG companies.

UNITED MYALL RESIDENTS AGAINST GAS EXPLORATION

The most important Australian court case so far, due to its exceptionally detailed consideration of the precautionary principle, is Telstra Corporation Limited v Hornsby Shire Council. The case was heard in the Land and Environment Court under Justice CJ Preston (24 April 2006):

Justice Preston stated in his judgement that:

"The principle and accompanying need to take precautionary measures is 'triggered' when two prior conditions exist: a threat of serious or irreversible damage, and scientific uncertainty as to the extent of possible damage".

This is the clearest possible statement that we need to hasten slowly. The Government must address the potential impacts to the environment and human health with proper research followed by sensible policies. We request that you make it very clear to the NSW Government that there are still many unanswered questions about CSG. We are not opposed to CSG in principle but it is vital that we do not destroy our environment and health in a headlong rush for the profits that supposedly flow therefrom. CSG is a short term industry that has potentially grave long term impacts.

As Dr. Sylvia Earle, one of the world's foremost marine experts and an authority on marine life in the Gulf of Mexico, stated in her testimony to the US House of Representatives Inquiry into the impacts of the Gulf of Mexico oil spill:

"While yielding to the pressure to extract golden eggs from the golden Gulf, we have failed to take care of the Gulf itself".

It is vital that the NSW Government does not do the same here.

Yours faithfully



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1. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF CSG ACTIVITIES

This is a major area where we urge the Government to adopt the “*Precautionary Principle*”. The current regime in NSW has created a CSG “*gold rush*” with exploration and mining companies grasping for the maximum number of opportunities.

The NSW Government has granted extensive CSG exploration leases and has approved some production leases. We have serious reservations that the risks of this massive and rapid development will not be properly managed resulting in significant long term harm to the environment.

Specific issues that we see include:

1.1 THE ASSESSMENT AND DETERMINATION PROCESS

We recommend that the Government structure its decision making in relation to coal seam gas to avoid conflicts of interest between those ministers granting approvals and receiving the revenue and those ministers whose role is to protect the environment, health and social wellbeing.

A key part of the decision-making process in relation to coal seam gas is the preparation of various reports to enable the assessment of any likely impacts on the environment, property owners, community infrastructure and so on. Reports produced by consultants who have been hired and paid by the CSG companies can readily be slanted to read well and to cloud or hide important issues. Consultants working in this way will inevitably have a loyalty and bias to the companies that are paying them.

A further question that we have not seen addressed, is how will the Government obtain the necessary quantity and quality of resources to review these reports properly. We do not believe that they will be able to do this.

1.2 EFFECT ON GROUND AND SURFACE WATER SYSTEMS

Coal seam gas is involved with water in multiple ways.

The Australian National Water Commission in its Position Statement on CSG in December 2010, said:

“Potential impacts of CSG developments, particularly the cumulative effects of multiple projects, are not well understood”.

The CSG industry “*risks having significant, long term and adverse impacts on adjacent surface and groundwater systems*”.

In its June 2012 update, the Commission reaffirmed that the principles articulated in its Position Statement remain a robust framework for the implementation of regulatory arrangements for managing the water impacts of CSG development¹.

The position of the scientists is clear – the impacts of CSG on water systems are not well known. Therefore the “*Precautionary Principle*” must apply.

¹ National Water Commission <http://nwc.gov.au/nwi/position-statements/coal-seam-gas>
Accessed 23/4/2013

1.3 DEGRADATION OF THE LANDSCAPE

A report prepared for the Australian Council of Environmental Deans and Directors² states in its conclusions on page 105:

“Fragmentation and loss of native vegetation resulting from the considerable surface footprint of CSG infrastructure represent a serious threat to biodiversity, threatened species and landscape function. Evidence from CSG developments to date indicates that severe negative effects are possible. Potential impacts include direct clearing of bushland, fragmentation of important remnant vegetation, spread of invasive species and increased fire risk.”

The Native Vegetation Act in NSW deals well with issues of clearing of native vegetation; however, overall, CSG operations are exempt from this Act.

The same report analyses one specific case on pages 33-34:

“Experience in the Pilliga indicates that CSG exploration and production lead to clearing and fragmentation of native vegetation that may have major consequences. Even during the exploration phase, the following impacts have occurred: clearing of up to 150 ha of native vegetation, heavy fragmentation of 1,700 ha of native vegetation and an increased footprint across 44,000 ha of native vegetation.

If the full production project proposed by Eastern Star Gas is approved, it would allow the clearing of at least 2,400 ha of native vegetation and the fragmentation of an area of 85,000 ha. Well-pads would be cleared to a size of 1.2 ha, some 1,000 km of pipelines would be cleared, and there would be additional clearing for roads, tracks and infrastructure. Well-pads would be placed on a 500–700 m grid, effectively carving up the most intact patch of bush in western NSW into a highly fragmented industrial zone.

Numerous scientific studies have reviewed the impacts of fragmentation of bushland on native fauna. Fragmentation of a landscape that has already received extensive clearing can have very large impacts on biodiversity and landscape function. This cumulative impact is critical and requires careful consideration and attention.”

This destruction of our native vegetation should never be permitted. If CSG becomes widespread in NSW, the pattern of destruction will be repeated in many places.

1.4 OVERALL CARBON FOOTPRINT OF CSG

The carbon footprint of CSG (>95% methane) is touted by the CSG companies as being about half that of coal. They assume that there is minimal leakage of methane between the production well and the end user. Methane leaking into the atmosphere is a potent greenhouse gas with many times the global warming potential of carbon dioxide. Because the leakage of methane during mining, processing, storage and transport is unquantified there is some doubt as to whether CSG has in practice the lighter carbon footprint. Detailed independent full lifecycle analysis of the carbon emissions of the Australian CSG industry with comparison to coal and renewable energy is needed.

It is clear that far stricter regulation regarding fugitive emissions is necessary.

² An Analysis of coal seam gas production and natural resource management in Australia
Issues and ways forward By John Williams Scientific Services Pty Ltd October 2012

1.5 SALT AND PRODUCED WATER

CSG production results in enormous quantities of salt and produced water. We have not seen any evidence of a proper solution to the disposal of salt. There are also questions about the treatment and use of the produced water. It is vital that these questions are resolved in advance of the commencement of large-scale CSG production.

2. HEATH IMPACT OF CSG ACTIVITIES

This is a major area of concern and appears to have received scant attention from the Government. We believe strongly that there must be NO health impacts from CSG activities.

2.1 AIRBORNE AND WATER BORNE CHEMICALS

Doctors for the Environment Australia regards CSG mining as a significant threat to public health³. They say: *“The current level of assessment, monitoring and regulation of CSG exploration and mining activities in Australia is inadequate to protect the health of current and future generations of Australians.”*

In December 2012, the South Western Sydney Local Health District of the NSW Government complained that there had been no specific human health risk assessment in relation to a CSG project in the Camden area.

The situation is very clear – there has been no adequate research and the regulatory regime does not impose the necessary requirements for human health assessment.

2.2 NOISE, DUST AND VIBRATION

CSG mining involves heavy industrial activity – drilling, heavy vehicle movements, light pollution and so on. Current government guidelines allow this to occur as close as 200 metres from a property owner’s residence. The legislation also permits the drilling rig to operate within 50 metres of a garden, vineyard or orchard. Putting it mildly, this is unacceptable and stressful. It may result in significant health problems for any property owners subject to such interference. In addition there are numerous unknown persons (the workers) gaining access to the person’s property at all hours of the day and night.

We recognize that the NSW Government has announced that CSG operations will not be permitted in residential areas however there are still very many dwellings that do not fit within this category. Are they to be abandoned? The Queensland Government report on Coal Seam Gas in the Tara Region⁴ acknowledges the impacts of noise and vibration.

It is very clear that these are major issues and need to be addressed properly.

³ Submission from Doctors for the Environment Australia to the Parliament of New South Wales Coal Seam Gas Inquiry 15 September 2011 - Summary on page 3

⁴ Coal Seam Gas in the Tara Region: Summary risk assessment of health complaints and environmental monitoring data – Queensland Health March 2013

2.3 SOCIAL IMPACTS

The CSG process can divide previously close-knit rural communities. It increases tension and disharmony, impacts on local economies and threatens other industries. The end result may be poorer mental health, with increases in depression and anxiety. Impacts include:

- Loss of control of one's property.
- Impacts of heavy industry intruding into a formerly peaceful rural landscape.
- Loss of visual amenity.
- Increasing prices and competition for resources in mining towns.
- Impacts resulting from an influx of temporary workers.
- Loss of property values.

The authors of this submission have spoken with many people in the nearby Gloucester area where CSG and coal mining activities are intruding on the formerly peaceful valley. It is beyond doubt that these sorts of issues are having a significant effect on the health and well-being of many people in that area.

Interestingly, another recent judgement by Justice Preston , Chief Judge of the Land and Environment Court, also recognized the potential impacts of mining. In his judgement disallowing a mine in bushland which had been set aside a decade ago as an "offset" next to the town of Bulga, he said that the Government's approval of the mine could damage "*Bulga's sense of place*". We note that this judgement was obtained by the people of Bulga with the assistance of the NSW Environmental Defender's office. We find it scandalous that the NSW Government is taking steps to reduce the funding of the Environmental Defender's office. This is yet another subtle step by the government to support the mining companies.