

## Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment Bill 2013 [Provisions]

Thank you for the opportunity of making a submission to this crucial Senate Inquiry.

As water resources are vital for the wellbeing of residential, agricultural and environment sectors, I support the proposed legislation that enables the Minister for the Environment to take into account the water impacts of coal seam gas and large coal mining when assessing those projects for approval. I also support enabling the Minister to refuse such projects if the water impacts are too great, or impose conditions to protect water resources from coal seam gas and coal mining.

However, I want to ensure that these laws be made stronger and more encompassing of community concerns about protection of streams, rivers and groundwater. I also encourage the government to bring these new laws to the Senate, so they can be passed before the election.

I am concerned that the new laws do not cover all forms of coal and gas mining, such as shale gas, tight gas, and underground coal gasification. This is a gross omission from the legislation, as water resources are impacted by all forms of mining. I encourage inclusion of these additional forms of mining to the new legislation. I also want all coal seam gas and large coal mining project approved since Minister Burke became the Environment Minister to have their water impacts assessed to inform decision makers about the water impacts of developments that have been approved.

In addition, I am concerned that these new laws be applied to all projects approved after February 13 this year. This important because the big three New South Wales approvals made on February 14 – Gloucester coal seam gas and Maules Creek and Boggabri coal mines — have not yet commenced, so it is not too late for their approvals to be revisited and for the water impacts of these massive projects to be properly assessed.

Groundwater, stored in the Tomago Sandbeds, is an important supplementary source of drinking water for communities in the lower Hunter Valley, housing a significant proportion of the Region's population. The extensive historic impact of coal mining in the Hunter Valley, together with the rapid advancement of coal seam gas mining in the Region, is risking the quantity and quality of our water resources to support residential communities and a range of agricultural and livestock raising pursuits.

As protection of water resources is vital for communities, the Government needs to get serious about protecting landholders and communities from coal seam gas and large coal mining, by giving landholders the right to say no to coal seam gas and large coal mining projects on their land.

The proposed new laws acknowledge what a recent Senate Inquiry also found: the States have a poor track record on environmental protection. It's a good first step that the proposed new laws don't allow the Environment Minister to hand the responsibility to protect water from coal seam gas and large coal mining to the State governments; I also support applying this principle to all of the federal environment responsibilities, such as World Heritage areas and threatened species legislation. I, therefore, urge that the Committee stress the importance of keeping these new powers in federal hands.

I thank the Senate Committee for inviting comments for this Inquiry and humbly request that my comments be considered in the Senate's review of this important legislation.

Aina Ranke