

Senate Rural Affairs and Transport References Committee

Inquiry into management of the Murray Darling Basins – impact of mining coal seam gas.

Dear Sir

The mining of coal seam gas has an enormous impact on the existing landholders in the Murray Darling Basin area. Not only does it impact economically, socially and environmental to the farmer and towns themselves today but also it will have an impact on future development and growth in the region.

The area under coal seam gas exploration is the landowners “business premises” they produce a living from the land and as such have developed or are continuing to developed it to its full potential including improving soil fertility and grazing practices and installing and renewing infrastructure such as water and pipelines. Any impact on the existing land by coal seam gas exploration and development reduces the landowner’s viability.

As a landowner, I am concerned over the weeds and pests which may be brought in by the exploration infrastructure associated with the coal seam gas industry. I feel that before any work is done on the land in question, a thorough survey of the existing ecology should be undertaken. This includes the area where the exploration is to take place and the access area (roads). The landowner does his best to limit, control and eliminate any unwanted pests and weeds and if such occur after association with the coal seam gas industry the landowner can then take steps to obtain total eradication or compensation.

Also concerning is the water extracted from the aquifer in order to extract the coal seam gas. The extraction of the water could have serious effect on the bores in the area and jeopardise the water available to stock. Also plans to release this water into the existing Murray Darling System may impact on the ecology of the water ways. The Australian Landscape is subject to variation in water level and flow due to climatic conditions, what impact would a constant and available supply of water would have on the ecology surrounding the water system.

The Australian Government has decreed that water has to be returned to the Murray Darling river system and has reduced water licences and brought up properties in order to do so. The Coal Seam Gas industry can now supply some of this water as a by product of extracting gas. My worry is that this water is a limited resource and if the Murray Darling System is relying on this “supply” when the inevitable happens and the supply runs dry what plans does the government have in place continue to supply this water to the system.

The rural landowner is constantly planning and revising his management approach in order to make better use of his available resources. The impact on a gas hole on his property may initially cause no inconvenience to his plan however in later years he may find that the position of this infrastructure may be of considerable hindrance to him and his property plan. Therefore a compensation agreement should be in place at the initial stage to counter this problem. This agreement should also cover changes of land use such as changes from open grazing to feed lot. The

value of the land is reduced due to pipeline or gas extraction infrastructure on the land and if the landowner wishes to sell at a later time the value of his land is greatly reduced or it is a worthless asset.

I have no doubts that the coal seam gas industry will continue to exist as the government is dependent on the royalties it will produce. But the impact of this industry on the existing rural population and towns and the future security of food productions needs to be seriously considered.

Regards
Brian
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Jackson