

Senate Inquiry into the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment Bill 2013 [Provisions]

I strongly support the passage of this Bill through the Senate as quickly as possible because Federal oversight of the impacts of coal and coal seam gas mining on water resources is desperately needed.

The proposed new laws should apply to all projects approved after 13 February this year so as to include the coal seam gas operations approved by the NSW government for Gloucester and coal mines at Maules Creek and Boggabri. It is essential that the water impacts of these massive projects be properly assessed.

I am very pleased that the bilateral approval provisions cannot apply to coal and coal seam gas developments that impact on water resources and that there have been some improvements to the exemptions. However, key projects such as the Arrow CSG project in Queensland and Camden in western Sydney must not be exempt, thus I urge minor amendments to remove s22 2b and 2d.

The Bill as drafted is a good first step to improve water protection but other amendments are required. These include extending these new protections so they apply to shale gas, tight gas, and underground coal gasification; strengthening the role of the Independent Expert Scientific Committee; defining significant impacts on water resources; introducing a set of requirements for the Minister to consider when making decisions on water resource impacts; and including a requirement for bioregional assessments prior to approval.

As we are only too aware here in NSW, the States have a poor track record on environmental protection. The Northern Rivers community has demonstrated solidarity in rejecting coal seam gas operations. We know that water is fundamental to the well-being of every species, be it human, fauna or flora and that it must not be sacrificed for short-term economic gain.

The Federal Government must maintain responsibility for protecting the nation's water from coal seam gas and large-scale coal mining.

Yours sincerely

Lorraine Vass
4 April 2013