

Subject: Submission to Extreme Weather Inquiry

Recent fires in the Pilliga Forest in the New England area of NSW and near Campbelltown in South Western Sydney beg questions about the potential impact of managing fires in areas with producing coal seam and other unconventional gas fields.

Intuitively it would seem a fire in an operating gas field would pose serious risks. Yet fire risks do not appear to have been adequately addressed in Environment Assessments for projects approved to date and many people do not know what the emergency plans are for gas companies in the case of a fire or what risks their are to the community.

Issues that should be considered include:

- The risks to landholders that might live only 200m (the minimum setback) from a producing gas well or other infrastructure exposed to fire.
- The risk to fire fighters operating near gas infrastructure.
- Risks of exacerbating fires from explosions or combustion of gas or fire fighters being able to access areas to fight fires because of gas infrastructure - including risks to fire fighting aircraft.
- The potential for gas infrastructure to cause fires from flaring and whether or not gas companies should be required to comply with total fire bans.

I have seen coal seam gas wells with very small cleared areas around well heads and some with grass right up to the well. Further clearing to keep fires away from wells would significantly increase environmental impacts from these projects and is unlikely to be appropriate, especially in forested areas.

Given the breadth of coal seam gas and other unconventional gas exploration licences in Australia today, there seems to be a need to clearly identify potential risks and ensure fire risks are appropriately considered in any planning processes for gas developments.

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