

Committee Secretary

Environment, Communications and the Arts- Standing Committee  
Re: Impact of Mining in the Murray Darling Basin

Background

I am sixty two years old farming in an area considered by some to be not "worth it", located thirty klm south west of Narrabri.

My qualifications are : Diesel Fitter by trade, First Class Marine Engineer by profession and I owned and operated a Heating business in the Blue Mountains for approx twelve years.

This is where I first came into contact with the damaging by-products of combustion of Natural Gas, a warning that all makers of condensing and semi-condensing appliances gave. The by-products are ACIDIC, I have seen first hand the damage that these by-products of combustion have done to concrete roof tiles, colorbond roofing, cement paths and various other metals.

NATURAL GAS IS NOT ENVIROMENTALLY FRIENDLY NOR ARE THE METHODS OF OBTAINING IT.

Let me start this submission by giving you a snapshot of where my property is in relationship to the Gas Mining Exploration taking place in PEL.238.

I have a Well known as Dewhurst 6 approx. 4klms south, a Well known as Dewhurst 8 approx. 2klms north, and it has recently been put onto the NSW DII website to put 6 more Wells, 2 Dams along with a Reverse Osmosis Plant and associated plumbing and machinery to assess the commercial viability of this location. To the east I have a Coalmine approx 8klms away and to the west I have a Core Hole known as Dewhurst 11 approx 2klms away, so you can see I am in the middle of a potential Gas field.

My problems with the Gas Miners of PEL.238 first started when they "fracked" the holes at the Bibblewindi site, our bore collapsed. The NSW Dept of Water agreed that we had suffered a collapse. The Leaseholders of PEL.238 said they were not to blame, and it was just a coincidence our bore collapsed at the same time they "fracked" their wells, (my stock and dogs felt the vibration-any farmer notices unusual movements of their stock.) Since then I have kept an eye on this Miner and watched their cavalier attitude to the local people and the surrounding State forest.

I have put a new stock and domestic bore down, at my cost, but I have concerns over the amount of Gas wells proposed for this area and the possibility that one or more of these wells may cut the Aquifers that supply my bore. There is simply not enough information concerning these Aquifers, their direction of flow, their interconnection, their size and length, in this Mining Lease to allow the Leaseholder to put down Gas wells where they feel gives them the best commercial gain with little or no apparent regard or responsibility to the landholders for water security.

Over the past 6 months I have had reason to raise concerns over breaches of both Environmental and Traffic and Transport Impacts as mentioned in the Exploration Licence and the Part 3A Approval for PEL.238. My concerns have been raised with the Leaseholder, NSW DII Environmental Branch and with Narrabri Shire Council.

The area where current and future exploration and development is to take place is known as the Southern Recharge Zone of the Great Artesian Basin and past, current and future drilling operations over at least 80% of PEL.238 will penetrate through this important Water Source and its impervious bottom to get to the Coal Seam beneath. I have requested of the Leaseholder information that shows the methods of drilling both horizontally and vertically can be adequately sealed not only to the basin floor, but all the way within the basin itself to prevent any cross contamination of Aquifer to Aquifer within the basin or cross contamination from water/Gas within the Coal Seam back to the water in the basin and/or vice versa. I have also requested full water analysis of water within the Coal Seam (supposedly millions of years old) as well as analysis of water taken from drillings, and before and after reverse osmosis. The Leaseholder will not supply these analysis reports for public or government scrutiny citing confidentially.

We have large, and soon small dams full of concentrated water containing what salts, and other substances, in places, should they leak (as has happened before) have the potential to pollute the Namoi River the State Forest and private land.

I do regular drives through the State Forest and come into contact with many Mine sites where I have filmed the collection ponds and taken flowing water samples. Most ponds are plastic lined but some are not (In September 2009 the NSW DII informed the Leaseholder that all ponds without exception must be plastic lined.) There are large deposits of salts around the water line of these ponds and at the unlined sites the salts extend out past the ponds.

I know that Narrabri Shire Council is having huge problems with this Leaseholder with respect to insuring that the Leaseholder honours their obligations under the various Exploration and Development Licences. This is not surprising when even the NSW DII, NSW EPA have the same problem in getting the Leaseholder to comply with licence conditions.

To sum up, my concerns cover the full spectrum of pollution to our Nations greatest assets, The Great Artesian Basin and the Murray Darling Basin, which can be caused by the uncontrolled, unregulated and secretive Gas Mining Companies, who don't seem to answer to the affected locals, State or Federal Governments or indeed anyone except their shareholders, and do all this using the reasoning of, and I quote from the Leaseholders document on Dewhurst 8 dated February 2009 "The discovery and development of petroleum resources within NSW is aimed at reducing the States dependence on sources of energy from interstate gas fields for electricity production and domestic gas supplies. This project and the ongoing activity in the area will assist in achieving this objective as potential reservoirs are delineated and exploration, development and appraisal activities occur over the next few years" The PEL.238 licence holder then goes on to talk about their responsibilities to the regional infrastructure, local people local fauna and flora, cultural heritage and Aboriginal heritage employment etc. BUT NOTHING REGARDING PROTECTING OUR ABOVE OR BELOW GROUND WATERS.

As stated earlier the Coal Seam Gas is being used for power generation. How many wells will need to be sunk to run a Power Station of proposed size (40 MW) when the well head gas pressures are in the order of 28PSI and to get a gas flow water trapped in the coal seam must be pumped out and processed. How long will this water need to be pumped out and how good is it when it has been in contact with the coal for millions of years?

So stop the Gas Mining within the Murray Darling and all parts of the Great Artesian Basin until we can be 100% assured that all of the Well sealing methods work 100% of the time, both today, tomorrow and for the future even after all the gas has been used up and the Gas Mining Companies no longer exist.

The Government should also insure through Federal and State Legislation that the Gas Mining Companies set up and fully fund an Environmental Damage Repair Fund to cover any environmental problems now and in the future that are the result of Mining activities and residue storage.

If the Committee wishes I can support this submission with documents from the Narrabri Shire Council, NSW DII, NSW Dept of Planning, NSW Dept of DECC Eastern Star Gas, Santos and approx 10 hours of video tapes.

Thank you  
Anthony Pickard.