

Like many thousands of Australians, I am very worried about the adverse affects of Coal Seam Gas development, and therefore am very pleased to hear about the Senate Inquiry into the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment Bill 2013 [Provisions].

Along with The Greens, I want these new laws to apply to all projects approved after February 13 this year.

This is important because the big three New South Wales approvals made on February 14 -- Gloucester coal seam gas and Maules Creek and Boggabri Coalmines -- have not started yet, 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.

I would also like to see all coal seam gas and large mining projects that were approved since Minister Burke became the Environment minister have their water impacts assessed, to inform decision makers about the water impacts of projects already approved.

The new water protection laws don't apply to shale gas, tight gas and underground coal gasification. These should also be included in the provisions.

I think it is a matter of principle that these laws should be brought before the Senate and passed before the September election. To delay them would suggest an equivocation, and that you are only paying lip-service to the environment. Ensuring the Senate enquiry has time to debate and (hopefully) pass them before the election will send a very clear message that the Government is actually serious about environmental protection.

The Four Corners expose on Coal Seam Gas on Monday night (April 1st), together with the American film Gaslands, should be a clear warning to all of us that the practice of fracking is not safe, that there are unacceptable risks, and that mining companies put environmental concerns last.

In a country as dry as Australia, any threat to our water supply, especially in agricultural areas, should not be countenanced for an instant. There is too much at stake. It may sound radical, but we can actually live without oil (with some adjustments to our way of life). We cannot live without water or food.

The other important issue is to keep environmental laws under the control of the Federal Government. State Governments have shown time and time again (as in the Four Corners report referred to) that they are too prone to forget the environment and only focus on the money to be made by exploiting it.

The environment is not, as some seem to consider, an optional extra. It is the life-support system of the planet and we are totally dependent on it. No-one would be allowed to damage the life-support system of a space-station. However, we have been tinkering with ours for far too long, and we will all be in grave peril if we do not take immediate action to stop the tinkering and repair what we have damaged.

Please think of the welfare of future generations, and ensure these laws are brought before the Senate as soon as possible.

Kind regards
Donella Peters