

Submissions to Senate Inquiry into the federal Government's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment Bill 2013 [Provisions]

I fully support the intention to amend the EPBC Act to include water protection for coal seam gas and coal projects.

The federal amendment to protect water resources is well overdue yet does not go far enough to compensate communities and individuals who already suffer from the impacts from coal and gas mining with contamination of water and air close to where they live and bring up cherished families.

The bill must have the power of a mechanism to enforce regulation of the IESC's recommendations or what is its purpose? All coal and CSG operations in Australia must provide credible scientific data and publish the results to prove water is not being polluted.

If the bill also allows currently approved projects to operate outside this protection, then it is discriminatory and unjust. I speak for rural and regional Australia when I say "Stop new coal and coal seam gas mining now!" Coal seam gas exploration in northern NSW since 2009 has had a number of detrimental impacts on water quality, vegetation, wildlife and human health. A few examples that come to mind: Pilliga Forest (EasternStar/SANTOS) NW NSW, Rappville near Kyogle N NSW (MetGASco).

It seems little is being done to monitor and survey the local impacts to community health, or other environmental and social effects caused by CSG exploration in NSW. There appears to have been very little government regulation or oversight of drilling activities near to residences or water resources. Minimal baseline testing has occurred and now that evidence of impacts, like methane migration is coming to light, we are seeing that monitoring procedures have been particularly poor, with local people noticing environmental changes, but afraid to voice their (mis)understandings of events because of a lack of verifiable information.

The NSW govt tells us that the Chief Scientists office will produce some brochures about CSG by July 2013. This from the state authority after the NSW govt have already approved csg production in a number of areas and the operating gas companies are now quickly exiting from the state. Metgasco (and now Dart), have rushed from the NSW northern rivers claiming no operational impacts during 5 years of exploration. The fact is there are impacts and they have not been investigated or reported.

The reason I cannot find any credible scientific research relating to coal seam gas impacts on water and public health is that there is no government information available and few published online publications. The health services are at a loss as to how they will diagnose methane and heavy metal poisoning, with a number of health

professionals seeking these amendments and more to protect community health from mining policy. Government regulators say there is no detectable gas in the air, yet independent testing reveals dangerous levels of chemicals in the air.

The health of people in the Hunter Valley is also compromised due to particulate from coal mines and trains. If air quality is bad, imagine the effects on surrounding water?

How are the Australian public meant to respond to these threats? The health of our families, the quality of our rivers and oceans are being compromised by a democratic system that has lost its way. The issue of air and water contamination from mining is not going away and yet our planning, regulation and exploitation of the resources without conscience of the impacts to community health and welfare suggests that business is prioritised over people.

Coal and coal seam gas mining is fast losing any social license to operate because the impacts are being experienced by many and the laws appear to be being written by the mining companies.

Strengthen the amendments to the EPBC water bill to protect all Australians from polluting mining operations. Water is more precious than politics!

Please include these points as a part of my submission:

1. The Bill is strongly supported and I would like to see it passed quickly through the Senate.
2. I am very pleased that the bilateral approval provisions of the EPBC Act cannot apply to coal and coal seam gas developments that impact on water resources, and that there have been some improvements to the exemptions.
3. I want to ensure that the exemptions contained in the Bill are minimised, and that key projects, such as the Arrow Coal Seam Gas project in Queensland and Camden in western Sydney, are not exempt from it. Therefore, I would still like to see minor amendments to remove s22 2b) and d).
4. I recognise that there are other amendments that would substantially improve the Bill, that may be required in the future, such as:
 - Amending the Bill to cover all unconventional gas mining, including shale gas and tight gas, and unconventional coal mining
 - 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
 - Including a requirement for bioregional assessments prior to approval

sincerely,