

**Submission to the Senate Committee on Environment Protection and Biodiversity
Conservation Amendment Bill**

4/4/2013

Dear Committee Members,

I strongly support legislation to prevent coal and gas mining in water catchments. The state government has failed to provide any enforceable legislation to protect water, the environment or our health. The Federal government must step in.

We live near Gloucester, NSW, an area with prime agricultural land, a thriving tourism industry and the potential to be a food bowl and holiday destination for Newcastle and Sydney for the long term. There is already a coal mine operating years beyond its initial approval, an AGL CSG project approved and an additional new coal mine being considered at present.

With a disregard to the 87% majority of Gloucester residents opposed to further mining and gas projects, and a failure to test the geology and water systems of our area, the state government approvals have shown it does not care about our vital water or our existing industries. More coal and gas mining will pollute our rivers and farmland from Gloucester up to the Manning and down to the lower Hunter, and change our landscape from rural to industrial.

AGL's CSG project application used rainfall data from only the past twenty-five or so years. There is data available for much longer which shows greater rain events in our history. If these rain events are repeated (as per a fifty-year cycle), AGL's holding tanks containing salty water will be below the flood level, meaning megalitres of salty water could escape onto surrounding land, rendering it infertile.

AGL's groundwater study has only investigated 7% of the project area. They are guessing as to what the other 93% of the geology is like and where the chemicals they use will go. Yet, the state government approved this project with such limited data. In addition, there is no specific plan in place to independently monitor and redress water pollution by this project. Already there are reports of bore wells bubbling and even rain puddles bubbling on a farm outside of the existing fracked areas. The project must be stopped now before further damage is done.

The Environmental impact studies in approvals processes presently only incorporate one extractive project at a time. Gloucester has three on top of each other. The accumulative effects of these on water have not been analysed by any governmental authority. We need the Federal government to legislate so that the accumulative effects of projects are considered.

As the state government's approval process is so fundamentally flawed in its failure to independently and thoroughly study all available data and to investigate fully the effects on the water catchments of whole of project areas, existing approvals should be overturned until real, independent studies take place. Please make sure the legislation means that exhaustive studies of the impacts on water of all industry in an area applies to all projects, whether already approved or not.

The Federal Government has an interest in protecting existing sustainable industry such as we have in and around the Gloucester valley so there will be employment for our children beyond the next twenty years. Even more importantly, the Federal Government has a responsibility to protect the water in food producing areas to provide water and food security for Australia in the long term.

Please protect us and our future,

Jennifer O'Neill