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Inquiry into the management of the Murray-Darling Basin – Impact of coal seam gas mining

Submission of Mayor, Councillor Katrina Humphries, Moree Plains Shire Council Public Hearing on Tuesday 2 August 2011, Narrabri, NSW

Several permits for coal seam gas exploration have been granted by the NSW State Government over land in the Moree Plains Shire. At this stage, approaches have been made by the holders of those rights (and companies working with them) to landholders in my Shire, including Moree Plains Shire Council as an owner of Shire roads, to undertake exploratory investigations for coal seam gas on such land.

As an inland regional centre, the Moree Plains Shire depends on underground sources for our water supply. As you may also be aware, Moree markets itself as “Artesian Water Country”; such is our reliance on this very important resource. Be mindful – this is not just the water we swim in, we drink it.

I feel extremely uncomfortable with coal seam gas exploration and extraction being undertaken in this Shire without significant protection in place for our important aquifers and for the monitoring of water security. I am not satisfied that the impact of coal seam gas exploration and extraction on our underground water supplies has been fully investigated. Until the impact of these activities is fully understood and our water supplies appropriately safeguarded, I believe it would be premature to entertain coal seam gas mining within this Shire.

Further, the Moree Plains Shire is one of the largest agricultural producers in Australia and this industry underpins the long-term economic viability of Moree. It appears to me that there has been little or no consideration of the impact of coal seam gas extraction on lands that are also used for high-value, intensive agricultural endeavours.

As a representative of the ratepayers of my Shire, I also believe that impact of the coal seam gas industry on the road network needs to be evaluated. There is already extreme pressure on local government in funding the maintenance of its road infrastructure. Understandably, the ratepayers of my community, who are currently in the second year of a Special Rate Variation, want to see their rates directed to maintenance of roads which are important to the community. Given the damage done to road infrastructure in other localities due to coal seam gas activities, I find it difficult to understand how this industry is carried free, with local government having no recourse to apply rates these companies.

My concerns are shared by many residents of the Moree Plains Shire.

In late June, the Moree Plains Shire Council, together with the NSW Farmers Association and the Greater Artesian Basin Advisory Group, hosted a public forum on coal seam gas extraction. This was

well attended and the sentiments expressed by participants echoed the overriding attitude being reported from other forums convened within villages of this Shire.

I would welcome the opportunity to talk to this submission at next week's Public Hearing in Narrabri to discuss these issues further.

Councillor Katrina Humphries

MAYOR