

Submission for the Management of the Murray-Darling Basin in particular the impact
of Coal Seam Gas
By Denise Ewin

I am a very concerned citizen of the Northern Rivers region in NSW. I am most concerned about the future of the Murray Darling Basin for various reasons but I am only writing today about the implications of the affect of the Coal Seam Gas industry on the Murray Darling Basin. I believe it may already too late for the Basin as many of the areas in QLD are already being heavily explored and thousands of gas wells set up in the Basin. Here is my very brief submission:

1. *The implications for agriculture and food production and the environment:*

- The impact on our water systems is of major concern. Not enough is fully revealed to the general public and indeed to government bodies, as to what chemicals are being used in the operation of extracting the methane gas. Although hydraulic fracturing is not used in all operations, there are other chemicals, which could cause damage to our ground and water systems. The actual waste water that is produced when extracting the coal seam gas is also another huge worry to our water systems. I have heard Dr Mariann Lloyd- Smith, Senior Advisor to the National Toxics Networks Inc speak at a meeting and was appalled at some of the chemicals and compounds of chemicals that she claims are being used in the process.
- Food security and agricultural activity have to be given top priority in this issue. I can't understand why our agricultural land is not considered important enough to save. Mining companies are buying up our prime agricultural land at an alarming rate with no thought for the future. To make matters worse, many of the companies that are buying our land are foreign owned. This has to be of concern for the future of feeding Australians and indeed other countries as well.

2. *The social and economic impacts of changes proposed in the Basin:*

- The legal right of landholders and property values is of grave concern. Never before have so many ordinary Aussies been confronted with such a challenge. Most Australians think that when they buy their property, spend a lot of money developing and improving it they own it. What a shock for many people when they find out otherwise! The social implications of this industry are frightening, as generally, despite what mining companies say, the ordinary person is not treated with respect and is often bullied into complying with laws that were put into effect many years ago, some even in the 19th Century. If we were truly property owners then we should have more rights in regard to the use of land we have looked after and developed. I realise that at this time the resources under the ground belong to the Crown but that doesn't take away from the fact that this is a devastating thing to happen to people. Here is a quote from a submission made by Doctors for the Environment to the Rural Affairs and Transport References Committee Inquiry into Management of the Murray Darling Basin in regard to mental health of peoples affected by mining:

“Mental Health Impacts

Water and air pollution, water shortages, permanent degradation of productive agricultural land and loss of livelihood and landscape...all have mental health consequences for communities living in a gas field.

Solastalgia is a recently developed concept in Australian psychiatry, which identifies and describes environmentally induced distress. *'As opposed to nostalgia the melancholia or homesickness experienced by individuals when separated from a loved home, solastalgia is the distress that is produced by environmental change impacting on people while they are directly connected to their home environment'.*"

This issue has to be taken seriously even though we hear over and over that this industry is for the benefit of all the people in Australia. There are going to be a lot of people sacrificed for the good of the country unless there are changes made to legislation to better protect people affected. Compensation for landholders is very poor compared to the royalties that go to the state with mining activities. Community consultation and local government involvement is minimal and quite often there are meetings behind closed doors that the general public can't attend or don't know about. Honesty and transparency is not a strong point with mining companies and indeed all levels of government. There is a groundswell of opposition from all walks of life to the mad rush for CSG. Mining companies and governments do generally not appreciate this opposition but as we still live in a democracy, people's concerns have to be taken seriously.

2. *The social and economic benefits or otherwise for regional towns and the effective management of relationship between mining and other interests:*

- While there could be some benefits for local people with employment, I would have to see a complete cost analysis done before being convinced of the benefits of this industry to anyone in rural areas. As far as social benefits are concerned, when the mining companies can guarantee that water systems are not going to be affected, the environment will be cared for properly and landholders will be compensated accordingly and treated with respect, then and only then will I consider the coal seam gas industry to be of any benefit to our rural areas.

I consider the way this industry has raced ahead to get licences to explore in nearly every corner of Australia ludicrous. I liken it this rush for coal seam gas to the crazy gold rush days, but now it's not the ordinary person who will benefit but the big mining companies. Even though the companies claim that they extract and do not mine, they are still big players.

To conclude I would like to make the following recommendations:

- A full moratorium be placed on all forms of coal seam gas drilling until environmental, social and health impacts have been rigorously and independently assessed.
- Coal seam gas exploration and mining to be made subject to all relevant environmental legislation including the native vegetation and water management laws.
- The provision of standing to ensure that the community has full legal rights to challenge and enforce environmental laws under which coal seam gas companies are operating.
- The provision of a right in the Petroleum (Onshore) Act to allow landholders to refuse consent for coal seam gas exploration or production on their land and landholders to be treated with respect at all times.

- A prohibition on coal seam gas exploration and mining in important bushland, valuable farmland, world heritage areas, groundwater aquifers, near creeks and rivers, in catchment areas, residential areas and public lands.
- All chemicals used in coal seam gas drilling or hydraulic fracturing must be assessed by the chemical regulator before being approved for use.
- Legislation reviewed, amended and updated to protect landholders and to provide improved compensation for landholders.
- Honesty and transparency by mining companies to be compulsory.

I believe that major changes need to be made to many aspects of the use of the Murray Darling Basin waters. I have lived on properties with irrigation, so I do know a bit about this issue. However, the coal seam gas industry is just the latest and worse industry to come along and probably totally ruin the Basin. I am fearful that our rural landscape is going to become an industrialised wasteland with our water systems poisoned if not forever, for a very long time.

Yours sincerely

Denise Ewin