

I have followed the CSG industry and government processes over a period of 3 years now, and have been active in speaking out about the CSG industry and the whole way in which processes and approvals are granted without any onus on industry to provide baseline data for potential impacts on water and environment. I have read an article written by Marion Carey of Monash University "We need to do our homework on the health risks of coal seam gas" and will paste her comments here - "Health and community groups have consistently expressed concerns that the level of assessment and regulation of CSG activities in Australia is inadequate to ensure environmental protection and the health of present and future generations.

Despite governments allowing rapid development of the industry, there are still many information gaps. The homework has not been done to properly work out what the carbon footprint of the CSG industry really is and how much it will contribute to acceleration of climate change.

We don't know how loss of farmers' water will be somehow be "made good" or where all the waste water and salt will go. And we don't know whether techniques developed on the run – such as aquifer re-injection (putting treated waste water back underground) – will create further problems, such as increasing the risk of earthquakes. Particularly of concern for human health is the lack of information on chemicals used and wastes produced during drilling and fracking. There has been no comprehensive hazard assessment of the chemical mixtures used, their impacts on the environment or human health, and the cumulative effects of exposure. Lacking also is comprehensive environmental monitoring and health impact assessment. Enormous community backlash has led to encouraging developments in NSW, with plans to legislate improved protection from CSG operations.

But it's a case of two steps forward, one step backward, with moves already in place in NSW to allow councils to exempt their areas from the new protections. There are also ongoing concerns about exploration in drinking water catchments and impacts on communities not covered by the proposed legislative changes, such as Fullerton Cove and Gloucester. The NSW Government has chosen not to implement the recommendation of its own inquiry into CSG to ban fracking until the chemicals used have been assessed for their intended use and toxicity.

CSG developments are being rushed through before systems are in place to protect local communities. Not only must environmental assessments for unconventional gas projects be transparent, independent and comprehensive, but they should include health impact assessment. Tough approval conditions also mean little, unless they are followed up with adequate enforcement, and comprehensive baseline and ongoing environmental assessments. These processes must be in place before any CSG activity commences.

I encourage the government to bring the new water trigger laws to the Senate, so they can be passed before the election. I live on the Wilson River in the Northern Rivers, and have very grave concerns as to the impact of any CSG activity on the waterways of this area. Any contamination of, or diminishing of the water table would have huge impacts on the whole population of the Northern Rivers.

Based on the current practice of the NSW State Government to green light all CSG activity in this state, I would stress the importance of keeping these new powers in federal hands.

Kind regards  
Judi Summers