

SUBMISSION INTO THE IMPACTS OF THE COAL SEAM GAS INDUSTRY

FROM: Marilyn Bidstrup

Background:

My husband and I have been farming in the Warra district for the past 36 years. On our farms we grow a variety of crops including Chick Peas, Mung Beans, Sorghum, Cotton, Corn and Wheat. In the later years our sons have come home after university to join us in our farming operations.

Submission:

I wish to thank the Senate Standing Committee for giving me this opportunity to make this submission into the impacts of the Coal Seam Gas Industry.

Water and salt are the biggest issues with this industry. In years gone by the Government and landholders have spent millions of dollars in the capping of free flowing bores so as to conserve water in the Great Artesian Basin. The essence of life is water and food. This industry (without any licences) is able to draw up whatever water it needs to so that the gas can be bought out – along with this water coming out is tons of tons of salt. All landholders have to be licensed to pump water from a river or an aquifer – why should this industry be exempt from this.

The Great Artesian Basin waters approx. 20% of Australia and it a lifeline for most towns and properties in the country. The risk of contamination of the water sources is immense and to date there has been no indication that this

contamination will not occur. It will only take one accident!! Is this a risk worth taking? No other industry in Australia would be given such a free go ahead.

The Government has a 'make good' clause – it will be impossible to make good if there is no suitable water there to make good with. Another problem will be to determine which company would be at fault, or to what proportion, so that 'make good' could occur. It will be a blame game between the companies and then the ones who will pay will be the rural communities or individual concerned.

Australia is a very dry continent so with the environment in mind – not to mention agriculture -where the food comes from – surely we should protect this water source with all our might.

There will be huge tonnages of salt coming up with this water. This salt could very quickly contaminate land surface making it completely unusable. Should one of these huge storage dams burst or leak it could very easily make its way into the Murray Darling Basin or any river system for that matter. It would be a catastrophe. Again, immense amounts of money have been spent on protecting the life of the river systems and yet this industry has been given the right proceed.

The effects this could have on prime agricultural land with the building of infrastructure eg .. gas wells, pipe lines, gravel roads on cultivation, pump stations, holding ponds etc will be immense. Agricultural today is highly technical with the use of GPS gear that will take machinery on the same path each and every time. The placing of gravel roads on or near cultivation will obstruct water flows and drainage. The salt that comes up with the water could also contaminate the land very quickly. It would not be uncommon for a pipeline to break or leak. Along with all of the above the owners of the property will have strangers coming onto their property (near their house where it is possible there will be small children running around) day and night – a real invasion of privacy. Another real concern is the value of rural properties which could fall considerably or be unsaleable.

The global population is growing rapidly and reports of food shortages regularly occur. Surely there should be protection of prime agricultural land for food production. We, as Australians should be as self sufficient in food as

we can be and not reliant on other countries. Our Asian neighbours' are very heavily populated and are already struggling to be self sufficient in food. A hungry neighbour will not be a friendly one.

The property owners don't have any real say as to what is going to happen to their properties. Oh yes, if we can't agree with the company concerned we can take them to the Land Court but just 10 days after it has been lodged in the Land Court the company can come onto the property and start their drilling. Where is there property rights? The property owner would not be able to pay the costs of a huge international firms court costs – where are our property rights?

With the mining and gas companies coming closer and closer, rural property owners are feeling great angst. Property owners are unsure of their rights and are not used to dealing with such companies. Farmers near retiring age view their farms as their retirement nest egg or superannuation and with gas wells on their farm are unsure as to whether they will be able to sell and move away from the area. Who will buy them with the gas wells there? Some rural folk may owe considerable amounts of money to the banks – how will this affect their financial situation. I feel depression will be a huge issue in the country. The stress with all the extra worry will be just too much. It is a very worrying situation.

If anyone in the cities or towns feel we have nothing to worry about maybe they should have a gas well or a pump station in their backyard and see how they feel with the noise, possible leakage and people who you don't know coming and going day and night.

It is unbelievable the government relies on self assessment and self monitoring with these companies. This doesn't give a great deal of confidence within the rural communities. The mining and gas employees have an arrogant attitude and why wouldn't they when they have the right to do whatever they please.

Many mining and gas companies have a fly in and fly out work force. This is a real concern to local communities. There is no participation into rural community activities eg – the sporting clubs, schools etc. It makes for a them and us community and this is not healthy. The only businesses in the rural towns that are better off since the start of the mining boom are the pubs, clubs and motels. The mining and gas employees have such a high wage and can afford to pay huge rents for accommodation leaving the everyday shop

employee or a mechanic etc unable to find suitable housing and often leave the township so that they can find affordable housing.

This industry is reported to last only 25 – 30 years. In the Surat Basin the townships have up to date been based on agriculture. It is important that the business houses in these towns are able to maintain a profitable business so that after the gas and mining boom have gone there will still be a base for the townships to continue.

While these industries are a boom for the state's economy we feel that it should not happen if it cannot be proven that there is not going to be any adverse effects of the Great Artesian Basin and on any food producing land. Both of these will not be able to be replaced.

Summary:

In all, it is a guessing game and surely for all Australians this is not good enough. Environmentally, for both land and water issues it could be an absolute disaster. Disasters do happen, and if nothing is put in place to protect it from happening then we only have ourselves to blame. While, we would all agree that Australia economically needs these power projects, I feel that people must be made accountable before it is too late. It could potentially be a disaster waiting to happen.

Marilyn Bidstrup

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