

Submission to Senate Inquiry into the federal Government's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment Bill 2013 [Provisions].

I, Susanne Hopfner, would like to support the Bill in the following way:

1. The Bill is strongly supported and I would like to see it passed quickly through the Senate.
2. I am very pleased that the bilateral approval provisions of the EPBC Act cannot apply to coal and coal seam gas developments that impact on water resources, and that there have been some improvements to the exemptions.
3. I want to ensure that the exemptions contained in the Bill are minimised, and that key projects, such as the Arrow Coal Seam Gas project in Queensland and Camden in western Sydney, are not exempt from it. Therefore, I would still like to see minor amendments to remove s22 2b) and d).
4. I recognise that there are other amendments that would substantially improve the Bill, that may be required in the future, such as:
 - Amending the Bill to cover all unconventional gas mining, including shale gas and tight gas, and unconventional coal mining
 - Strengthening the role of the Independent Expert Scientific Committee
 - Defining significant impacts on water resources
 - Introducing a set of requirements for the Minister to consider when making decisions on water resource impacts
 - Including a requirement for bioregional assessments prior to approval

Environmental protection is no longer a domain of the Greens Party. With the advent of CSG mining exploration and production of all types of unconventional gas in Australia, the issue of protecting our environment has mobilised the mainstream, and as such the major parties are called upon to act in the interest of the people of Australia. I am seriously concerned that CSG mining will lead to contamination of water ways, ground water and aquifers.

On 3 August 2011, The Sydney Morning Herald reported this:

"The coal seam gas industry has conceded that extraction will inevitably contaminate aquifers. The Australian Petroleum Production and Exploration Association told a fiery public meeting in Sydney that good management could minimise the risks of water contamination, but never eliminate them. "Drilling will, to varying degrees, impact on adjoining aquifers," said the spokesman, Ross Dunn. "The extent of impact and whether the impact can be managed is the question."

If Australia is serious about its other strategic goal of becoming a global food supplier, the very real risk of water contamination through coal seam gas mining practices is completely at odds with this goal. It is nonsensical to allow pollution of your own waterways and aquifers while aiming to grow food with polluted water. Who is going to buy the food? Who would want to eat it?

Thank you for taking the time to consider my submission.

Susanne Hopfner

4 April 2013