NWES

Promoting ecologically sustainable development

North West Ecological Services

Mr Phil Spark

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Senate Standing Committees on Rural Affairs and Transport
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RE: **Inquiry into management of the Murray Darling Basin – impact of mining coal seam gas**

Dear Reader
There is a great deal of concern amongst residents of the Namoi catchment regarding the expansion of coal seam gas mining. There is an application for some 550 well heads in the Narrabri area alone, and it seems that is the tip of the iceberg for what is to come.

People are concerned because it is seen as a threat to agricultural land, community way of life, flora and fauna, underground aquifers, and the great artesian basin.

Initially gas was seen as the clean green saviour that would provide the transitional energy source to allow phasing out of coal. But it is becoming increasingly apparent that there a major drawbacks, as has been recently observed with test bores in the Pilliga State Forest.

The major drawbacks include;

- Cross contamination and polluting of ground water
- Loosing ground water resources by drilling through aquifers
- Saline water spillage resulting in tree deaths, salt scalds and contaminated soils.
- Overflow of drill ponds leading to contamination of creeks.
- Treated waste water changing the ecology of local creek systems and reducing water quality.

- Use of large volumes of water for drilling and fracking, water already over allocated.
- Construction of major toxic water storage impoundments and associated environmental impacts.
- Toxic water storages left open to wildlife, leading to animal deaths.
- Clearing and fragmentation of high conservation value vegetation.
- Destruction of large areas of habitat for threatened species.
- Dramatically increased fire risk.
- Threats to important groundwater dependent ecosystems and wetlands
- Pipelines degrading important agricultural lands and degrading high conservation value areas such as Travelling Stock Routes
- Spreading invasive plants through areas of high conservation value.

For the residents of the area these concerns far outweigh the potential economic benefits. They feel threatened that they have no rights to stop the drilling on their land, they are worried about the security of their water entitlements, and they don't want their community to change for the worse.

Allowing the coal seam gas industry to go ahead will:

- Transform rural landscapes into industrial zones
- Forever change the socio-economic profile of communities, with a fly-in/fly-out workforce that does not participate in the community.
- Undermine regional communities who depend on cohesion and resilience
- Represent a serious threat to water resources, including the Great Artesian Basin
- Result in farmers losing control of their land
- Provide property rights to miners rather then the custodians of the land
- Undermine the rights and interests of Traditional Owners
- Represent a health risk due to methane leakage and aquifer contamination.

The potential economic gain cannot justify the risks involved. Ideally Coal seam gas extraction should be banned in the Murray-Darling Basin. If not, it should at least be prohibited on prime farmland, bushland, and anywhere associated with important aquifers. And landholders should have the right to say that they don't want coal seam gas extraction or exploration on their properties.

Idea for economic stimulus for small towns affected by reduced allocation.

I have spent considerable time in the Lachlan River valley were irrigation water has been non existent for at least eight years. Those towns have already been impacted and have accepted their fate that climate change could see irrigation agriculture a thing of the past. I have noted that there are extensive areas of Cypress pine remnants throughout the region, which could be thinned and managed in a sustainable way to create a high value timber industry that would help the local economies. Some of the adjustment package could go into kick starting that industry.

The other issue I have noted is a need for weed control along roadsides, riparian areas, and travelling stock routes. These areas of high conservation value are being lost to weed invasion, and without intervention lost permanently. Teams of people could be employed to carry out weed control that will protect our native flora and fauna.

Yours sincerely
Phil Spark