Fiona Paul

Senate Standing Committees on Rural Affairs and Transport
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia
This is an email attachment to rat.sen@aph.gov.au

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Dear Committee Secretary

I am writing to you regarding the **Inquiry into management of the Murray Darling Basin – impact of mining coal seam gas.** I've just been informed of this inquiry, and understand that the deadline has been extended to 15th July.

As a resident of Tempe, just down the road from the proposed Dart Energy coal seam gas (CSG) exploration site in St Peters, Sydney, I am well-acquainted with the detrimental health, social and environmental impacts of CSG mining. Over the past several months our community has educated itself on the reality behind this under-regulated, unsustainable and carbon foot-print heavy gas.

I am shocked that CSG mining is being considered for the Murray Darling Basin – at all!

Surely the Federal Government would not allow such a fragile, important and unique source of water, wildlife and farming land to be further ruined by a cross-hatching of surface pipelines, bushland clearways, and hundreds of gas-wells just 300 – 700 metres apart?

Aren't we meant to be saving the Murray? Not kicking it while it's down.

For the following reasons alone, CSG should not proceed in the Murray Darling Basin.

CSG is UNDER-REGULATED

CSG is currently being managed via a hotch-potch of state legislation which has been created for surface coal and oil mining industries – the legislation barely mentions CSG and is not aligned or tied to existing Water, Environmental or Food Security legislation.

CSG WASTES WATER & CREATES TOXIC WATER WASTE

CSG mining methods require vast amounts of water to "flush out" the gas from coal seams deep below the surface. The need for such vast amounts of water with this method of mining is a **direct threat to the sustainability of water aquifers and future water licensing arrangements** in the Murray Darling Basin.

Even when "fracking-free" extraction methods are used, carcinogens, radioactive elements, salts and toxins – which occur naturally in coal seams – get mixed with the subterranean groundwater, and are also brought to the surface, where they become toxic waste in large evaporation ponds.

CSG is WORSE THAN COAL OR OIL

"The take-home message of our study is that if you do an integration of 20 years following the development of the gas, shale gas is worse than conventional gas and is, in fact, worse than coal and worse than oil," (Robert Howarth, David R. Atkinson Professor of Ecology, Cornell University. See http://www.news.cornell.edu/stories/April11/GasDrillingDirtier.html)

CSG is UNSUSTAINABLE

CSG mining directly contradicts the Government's own position on sustainable environments. The surface destruction of land associated with CSG mining **degrades prime agricultural land and undermines Australia's food task**.

One need only look at the deep concerns raised by farmers in other NSW and Queensland farming areas in conflict with CSG mining, to realise how destructive this mining method is to the farming environment. Fiona Simson of the NSW Farmers Federation has spoken out on this many times.

As a city consumer of locally produced food, I am concerned about our "clean food" reputation being trashed. How does that help our farmers differentiate their product? How does that help me as a consumer choose wisely for my family?

PROPERTY RIGHTS AND VALUES OF LANDHOLDERS

The dilution of land property values as a result of CSG mining is well documented by farming communities. Our local community group Sydney Residents Against Coal Seam Gas, is closely connected with many country community groups and all of them decry how the value of their land has been permanently trashed by CSG. See The Australian "Residents Fear House Prices Will Plunge" http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/nation/residents-fear-house-prices-will-plunge/story-e6frg6nf-1226081610091

Unlike some other mining practices, CSG damaged land and waterways cannot be restored. It is permanently made useless for productive farming, human dwelling and wildlife habitat.

CSG mining is in no way compatible with, or able to co-exist with, farming, wildlife or urban environments. To say it is, is simply wrong.

With the way the Land and Environment Court legislation is today, it means that if a farmer (or city-dweller) objects to mining access, then failing consultation, the mining company gets access as soon as the case goes to the LEC. **There are no effective landholder rights** and this is why the "Lock the Gate" campaign is spearheading the anti-CSG movement across Queensland and NSW today.

SHORT-TERM GAIN FOR LONG-TERM DESTRUCTION

CSG mining brings a limited number of fly-in / fly-out workers, for a relatively short period of time, 5 – 15 years. Town rents rise, farming land values plummet, and previously diverse and cohesive socio-economic environments are trashed by a short-term mono-industry.

When the mono-industry leaves, the town environment is left hollowed-out and degraded.

Sadly, as a previous resident of the beautiful Upper Hunter Valley, I know this cycle personally. Previous neighbours of mine who grew award-winning wines have now pulled out their vines, and are grateful to have two of the few remaining non-mining jobs in the local milk factory and hospital. Tourism is on its last legs in the Upper Hunter. Denman is a sad and depressed version of its former self. I visited there recently, it is no longer a thriving, cohesive country town.

Aren't the Murray Darling Basin communities suffering enough already with the current and planned water restrictions?

HEALTH IMPACTS

Earlier this year I attended a forum on "The Human Health Impacts Of Open-Cut Coal Mining & Coal Seam Gas Mining" with the following speakers:

- DR LINDA SELVEY (GREENPEACE)
- DR DICK VAN STEENIS (UNITED KINGDOM)
- DR TUAN AU (SINGLETON)
- DR HELEN REDMOND (DOCTORS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT)

The facts presented are chilling.

I refer you to the submission by the Doctors for the Environment, submitted to Senate Standing Committees on Rural Affairs and Transport, on 27th June 2011.

Communities of all kinds, from inner city Sydney to the Murray Darling Basin and beyond, are looking to the Federal Government to step in and put a stop to CSG mining.

CSG is not a transitional, sustainable fuel. It is not the same as "natural gas".

The permanent destruction wrought by even non-fracking methods of CSG mining on our water, land, agriculture, socio-economic fabric, and health far outweighs any short-term commercial benefit.

It just doesn't add up.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to your considerations with this submission.

Best regards

Fiona Paul