Dungarvan Pastoral Co

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Rural Affairs and Transport
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

30th June 2011

Dear Senators

I am writing regarding the impact of mining coal seam gas on the management of the Murray Darling Basin.

My husband and I own a broadacre and cattle farm east of Bellata in the Moree Plains Shire. We are deeply concerned with the economic, social and environmental impacts of coal seam gas mining on the management of the basin. This will greatly affect rural life as we know it inhibiting running our business as a profitable enterprise.

Water is our lifeblood in rural Australia, not only for stock and domestic, but cropping. Interference with the precious aquifers shows not only dropping of water tables but salinity breakout points. Our rich black soil becomes unfarmable and worthless and our bores undrinkable. So far I have had no 100% guarantees from the coal seam gas companies that the technologies used will not affect the aquifers and the Great Artesian Basin.

Our property rights as freehold landholders are being compromised as the gas companies keep trying to gain access. We have said "no" to coal seam gas companies drilling a test well on our land. Next step is arbitration, then the land and Environment Court. We are farmers emerging from a long drought and owe the bank a substantial amount of money. How can we afford to do this?

We have invested heavily in prime agricultural land. This is a precious commodity which is irreplaceable. Providing food for Australia and the world is a very viable industry for farmers today, albeit very testing at times. We do not want to have to import food from other countries that do not have farming practices with such a high standard as ours. The global population is increasing at 210,000 people a day. The late Norman Borlaug said that "over the next fifty years, the world's farmers must produce more food than the total amount they have produced in the past ten thousand years combined". With gas wells every 750mt, interconnected with pipelines,

pumping stations, gravel roads for vehicles access and settling ponds over our farm, I don't know how this will be possible in prime agricultural land.

Current laws state that a gas well can be drilled 200mt from a dwelling and 50mt from a garden. In the testing stage this includes a campsite next to the well. Lights, noise and 24 hour access with vehicles are all something we would have to live with, as well as a campsite of men. Safety is being compromised as many isolated rural women and their families, like myself, spend a lot of time alone while husbands spend long hours on machinery. I don't think the gas companies can guarantee our 100% safety.

The stories coming out of Queensland are terrifying regarding coal seam gas extraction. Prime agricultural land becomes worthless as farming practices cannot be successfully carried out. Water coming out of bores can be ignited. Settling ponds are contaminating the land and waterways. Water tables are dropping. Fighting coal seam gas companies is affecting the mental health of farmers as arbitration and court cases are faced. The coal seam gas companies cannot guarantee 100% safety. Why the rush?

Please do not let this happen anymore. The Great Artesian Basin cannot be replaced nor can prime agricultural land. Decisions being made must look to the future, not the present, where cash strapped governments are chasing a quick buck and selling off our water and farmland for environmental vandalism. Let the farmers keep sustainably farming and feed Australia and the world. In 20 or 50 years time when the gas is finished, the water and land that is left will be unfit for agriculture. What hope is there for our future generations?

Angela Smith