

## **Submission to Independent Planning Commission**

Subject: Proposed CSG exploration by Santos, Narrabri Gas Project

Date 21/07/2020

Reason for submission: Objection

### Santos' Narrabri Gas Project seeks approval for 850 CSG wells in NW NSW

I herewith declare my objection to the above proposed CSG project. The reasons for my objecting to this project are stated below. Please, read thoroughly and consider with care the arguments herein and fine tune into the wide field of impacting issues that surround the Coal Seam Gas extractive industry.

To summarise, the objection to Coal Seam Gas extraction is based on the fact that CSG jeopardises the continuation of life and livelihoods of species and humans alike, because it destroys the natural environments that all life forms depend on to live well and healthy. CSG compromises mental and physical well-being and destroys rural economies. The economic short-term gain is in the hands of a few while ruining the long-term economic outlook for local agricultural production, that is now, in the face of a global pandemic, becoming a means of survival. It is hard to believe that the proponents of the CSG industry are very grotesquely superintend on letting the country of Australia go down a path of destruction, wilfully and knowingly. The go-ahead of CSG projects will in future leave a legacy of intense repercussions on innocent species and decent people.

*"It seems that nothing is sacred and nowhere is safe."* Fractured Country

The NW of NSW Is preparing for the unfolding of a giant gas field expansion that reaches from the far Queensland border down to Dubbo and Muswellbrook. The first of seven stages is the proposed Narrabri Gas Project with 850 wells chiefly concerning the Pilliga State Forest. The coal seam gas extraction in its multiple infringements comprises a far reaching sabotage on all fronts that is just crying out for protest and condemnation. The drilling into the lateral formations beneath the soil to get to the coal seams that contain the gas is as layered as the reasons against it. The deeper the layer that's been disturbed the more substantial the negative consequence. As we are drilling into the layers of the calamity we

will hit on insights and revelations that make the gas projects a must to be extinguished from our lives.

### **The Economic Issue - 250m deep –**

**Natural gas exploration and production is not labour intensive and will not generate significant employment opportunities for Gunnedah Shire.** *Gunnedah Economic Development Strategy, Vol. 1*

The current Narrabri Gas Project proposes 850 wells. If that is not massive already, all in all the industry aims to expand to 10's of thousands of wells over the coming two decades. That equates to a grit of gas wells spanning 40% of Australia. If all that land is destroyed the jobs on the land will be destroyed also, and with that the livelihood of the communities. Money talks only to the giants. Investment analyst, Bruce Robertson, warns that CSG requires steep investments and production costs are enormous, that paired with a global glut with sinking gas prices leads to the obvious conclusion that together with demand, returns are shrinking. The Wall Street Journal states that the natural gas market fell by 25% due to an oversupplied market and that the U.S. market is saturated with gas, as of recent with up to 40 tankers not being able to deliver to the global market. Furthermore, Australia is not 'short of gas', still being the largest exporter of gas globally. As the bulk of the gas harvested in Australia is being exported, the local market suffers under global prices. The industry is no boost for regional communities, and the royalties are fluctuating and anyhow very low. The ones who get their hands dirty in this business of corporate shenanigans are the workers on the ground.

The Santos Narrabri Gas project claims that it "could" supply NSW homes, business and industry, making the gas available via the yet to be built pipeline. Why they say "could" and not a definite "will" you can only guess. According to Dr. Alistair Davey and Roger Fisher in their report on the Narrabri Gas Project, Santos entered into a non-binding agreement to supply parts of the gas to a new ammonium nitrate plant to produce agricultural fertiliser, the plant would be built alongside the gas field project. Dr. Davey reckons that the bending towards the domestic market simply stems from the fact that the export option is too costly. To me it seems that the fierce competition of Queensland based gas companies like Arrow, who just got the green light to expand their operations in the Surat basin drive the push for the Hunter Gas Pipeline, running over 830 kilometres from Roma, Queensland to New castle,

NSW. With the development approval in place it all hangs in the go-ahead of the Narrabri Gas project, as it is conditional on the development of Santos' latest sweetheart project. According to the Hunter Gas pipeline website, the proposed pipeline will serve inland NSW with off take points at regional towns, crossing at length the "Narrabri-Gunnedah Gas Basin".

**"These [planning] documents cover concerns nicely, but the worry is when you get into the specifics of living with it long term."** *Pam Austin, Landholder*

It will deliver 350 construction jobs and 20 operational jobs. To quieten protest, the going opinion claims that gas-fired power stations are the best choice, because they emit less than half of the carbon dioxide of coal stations.

**"And its gas, so if it leaks it'll just evaporate."** *Garbis Simonian, Director, Hunter Gas Pipeline*

The Hunter Gas Pipeline is apparently "perfect for clean energy transition over the next 20 years until effective and competitive grid-based battery technology is developed." (HGP website). The cost for the pipe line is around A\$ 1.2 billion. That makes, together with the Narrabri Gas project, over A\$3 billion. There is no logic behind these economic weavings of tales. If the A\$3 billion of just two projects, would now be invested into renewable energy infrastructure development, we would not need this high cost squandering of money for a so-called "transition". The tale that gas is critical for domestic energy supply and the curious urgency that surrounds the gas projects that need fast-tracking to ensure immediate construction seems that the proponents are eager to get the spot light, in case renewable projects should take over.

Truth is, the push for Narrabri gas in connection with the Hunter gas pipeline, that is a China-controlled enterprise, smells of export.

The most interesting news on the global front is the two main reasons for the record low prices given by World Oil, an online platform. One is the onslaught of new supply, with exports of LNG from Australia to U.S. literally flooding the market, and Chinese demand slowing; the other is the warmer winter temperatures that are cutting consumption. The latter

meaning that fossil fuels having caused emission rises globally and subsequent warming of the planet now are faced with an economic downturn due to that warming, having just experienced the warmest winter ever recorded for the northern hemisphere. In addition, the dwindling profits can be traced to European markets, where an increasing tract of facilities simply swap gas and coal for renewable energy. The reason behind this is the growing opposition to fossil fuels. Energy Quest reported that Australia's shipments in May 2020 were 8 cargos lower than in April and that LNG experienced a "substantial surplus". Why then push for more gas exploration licenses if over supply is predicted to build further? I recommend to 'test drill' into sites like World Oil and Small Caps and conduct a little lateral search, and you'll find plenty of madcap projects just waiting to be exploited that will no doubt accelerate the warming of the earth.

### **The Agriculture Issue - 300m –**

As Lee McNicholl said, the resource sector is the biggest enemy of farming in Australia, and Dr. Geralyn McCarron, in her opinion, **“a region that is ear marked for gas development is a sacrifice zone.”**

The New York Times writes (12/2013), **“Hundreds of abandoned drilling wells dot eastern Wyoming like sagebrush; (...) companies that once operated the wells have all but vanished into the prairie.”** (*Dan Frosch*)

**CSG exploration in Gunnedah Shire has met with considerable opposition from residents, with the key concern being potential damage to the ground water resources, particularly under the Liverpool Plains.** *Gunnedah Economic Development Strategy, Vol.1*

The wells and gas infrastructure is an enormous legacy. There is no way to repair the damage. SE Queensland operates as the evil marker for CSG. Here, the massive invasive nature of the industry can't be denied. A proof for destruction of common good, air, water, land. The area of NW NSW is one of the most agriculturally productive local government areas of Australia.

The Moree plains, Liverpool plains have an abundant water supply because they can draw on the GAB having access to artesian and sub-artesian underground water resources, plus the

surface water from the inland river system. **There is a longstanding ban on exploration and extraction activities by the Moree Plains Shire council.**

### Society Issue – 400m –

**“Industrialisation of beautiful landscapes tears the people’s hearts.”** *Simon Clough*

**“This is a scale that is beyond comprehension. This is Australia.”** *Brian Monk, Landholder*

They do fracture the land, but they don’t succeed fracturing society. Communities are outraged and surveys have shown that the majority, well, over 90%, do not want the gas industry. There is a consensus that cannot be ignored. Seeing the decline in living quality, in farming business, the degradation of fertile land as example in their neighbourhood in Queensland, where towns in the Surat Basin are chillingly deserted after miners leave, and empty houses that spell no prosperous future for the town. Even Gladstone and Mackay experience a slump in house price.

Santos and partner, Energy Australia has together written off \$1.8 billion before the project has even started. No fat bank accounts for the unhappy shareholders. \$2 billion dollars down the drain and not one dollar for the communities.

It is a society issue on a grand scale. Not only the land grab and pollution, but the devastating consequence of having yet another challenge dropped on the communities who struggle with droughts and floods, fluctuating prices and depleted soils. It pushes people over the edge. You only can take that much. We are talking years and decades of hardship. If a health issue arises and there is no hope on the horizon because gas fields are penetrating every aspect of life, there is utter hopelessness. Mental well being is a far away dream; suicide is a sad reality, and when that happens in small communities it is frightening.

On the positive side there is a colourful vibrancy that surrounds the protests against gas, which is in stark contrast to the stale and cold attitude of the extractive industry.

### Ecological Issue – 550m –

**The forest is also part of a broader recharge region for the aquifer, which is part of the Great Artesian Basin aquifers, and activists and some landholders have expressed concern that coal seam depressurisation during gas production could impact groundwater pressure in the Pilliga Sandstone aquifer and affect the quality of water flow in the GAB aquifer. Anthony Barich, November, 2017**

Take a look at the Curtis Island gas export terminals near Gladstone, the entrance to the GBR. The aerial photos make you cry. It is a destruction site of boys playing with toys on a big scale.

Iconic natural areas are under threat like the Pilliga forest would have to brace for the virus that would spread in shape of hundreds of wells, threatening the Pilliga mouse, koalas, wallabies, wedge tailed eagles, to name but a few iconic animals that live here. Animals that call the forest their home amongst species of black pine trees, ironbark, black wood and stands of ghost gum.

The spill sights impose the problem of salt water spills into the water ways and aquifers. The practice is to flush the spills with water and discharge into the rivers. Contamination guaranteed. The streams are all connected and the contaminated water will end up in South Australia, no problem. Spills do occur. One of them, the Bohena 4/4L, involved 10,000 litres of toxic CSG waste water. The problem especially for the Pilliga is that salt contamination hardens the soil to a point that plants can't grow. Left are skeletons of trees, scattered over the ground. The gas company has no solution.

These once protected ecosystems and internationally recognised wetlands are in great danger to vanish. NSW has many mapped areas of high environmental value and ground-water dependent ecosystems. Protecting these assets maintains the diversity and habitat for flora and fauna.

The Moree Plains Shire Council recommends involving the indigenous community, the Kamilaroi (22% of total population) generally in ecological assessment processes, because the peoples "have significant knowledge and skills in the protection of local diversity and

natural resources.” Give this claim the highest attention in regards to assessing CSG exploration operations.

### **Environmental Issue – 650m –**

WATER:

**“The GAB is one of the great wonders of the world.”** *Drew Hutton.*

Hazardous chemicals in groundwater stay there for ever. Chemicals don’t “flush out”. What to do with the brine? Produce water gets discharged into the forest. “They pump their crap into the woods.” Jeremy Buckingham, NSW Greens. The open waste water ponds are of an enormous size, some measure 1, 5 by 1 kilometres. And there are lots of them. And they are leaking. Think floods. Each frack needs 10-30 million litres of water. Each well is being fracked multiple times and each time it is fracked the amount of water is the same.

Gift of the GAB: **“We could not survive without underground water.”** *Robbie King.*

Groundwater is a critical resource. The GAB is with 1,7 million square kilometres the largest underground water reservoir in the world, a quarter of the whole landmass of Australia. CSG interferes with the GAB’s subterranean system of aquifers of rock layers that were forming in the Jurassic period.

The biggest underground water catchment area worldwide. **“And once you pollute that you can’t unscramble the egg.”** *Michael Caton.*

Without the GAB food production in Australia is in jeopardy. CSG interferes with these water economics of the precious aquifers that form the GAB.

In Moree plains, crop growing would not be possible without that ground water reservoir. The whole of Moree is watered by ground water. Think drought and erratic rain fall and you know that a catastrophe is unfolding, if aggressive fracturing is added to the mix. It is not an experiment. It is a known fact. Even Santos admits that ground water pollution will be on the cards. Water goes where it flows.

## EMISSIONS:

Burning bores and bubbling rivers are proof of methane entering water reservoirs to a degree that is hazardous to health and dangerous in igniting fires. To risk that is environmental vandalism. Wells and pipelines leak. The fugitive emissions are a huge hazard. The NSW Department of the Environment and Energy details the emissions of the gas industry activities which are volatile organic compounds. The flares alone emit up to 250 different toxic chemicals, unquantified toxins that escape the valves and pollute the air. Particle pollution attached to dust washes into rain water tanks. One of the components for example is the radioactive caesium 137. The extremely toxic hydrogen oxide that has a particular stench is part of the noxious cocktail of benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene and xylene.

It is no wonder that residents near these gas operations complain about serious health problems and children are affected who will have health problems as adults, from neurological problems to cancer. Cancer has been found to be over proportionate in children and young adults in Bentleigh Park, Queensland, where numerous flares emit hazardous chemicals day and night.

The CSG industry is playing with fire. The flares still burn in a total fire ban imposing a huge risk to bush fires which have only recently ravaged the Pilliga so powerfully that the forest burned bare. 10's of thousands of hectares burned within hours. According to Peter Small from the Coonabarabran Residents against Gas, Santos' own fire plan is a worthless document without substance. It practically advises to leave the area and leave it to the volunteers to fight the fires.

According to a North West Protection Advocacy report by Anna Christie, Santos gas field emissions approach that of coal. The data around Santos licenses of the Narrabri project that are already in operation, average a CO<sub>2</sub> content 25-30%, some wells even 90% CO<sub>2</sub>. The find puts in question the quality of the gas and subsequent cost for developing deliverable gas. Santos must extract the gas and vent the CO<sub>2</sub> content to meet pipeline and user requirements. The practice considerably increases the greenhouse gas emissions around the project. Dr. Andrew Grogan states, that around one million tonnes per annum of carbon dioxide could be a by-product of the CSG production of the Narrabri project, concluding that emissions reach the level of coal extraction. So much for "clean gas" and the claim gas could bridge the transmission to low emission green energy.

## NOISE:

About 200 vehicles will come and go per new well put in place. The noise from the flares has been likened to that of jet engines that can be heard up to 2 kilometres away.

The reverse osmosis plant in Kenya, Queensland runs day and night.

Santos claims that intersecting coal seams sideways improves the flow of gas. A method that can only be described as more destructive, more intrusive, more dangerous.

After use, the well is decommissioned, sealed with cement and, according to Santos' unfounded statement,

REHABILITATION RETURNS VEGETATION TO ITS ORIGINAL STATE : BIG LIE!!!

## Community Resistance Issue - 800m –

Resistance of communities is strong. Films like 'Gasland', 'Fractured Country', 'Sacrifice Zone' and 'The Bentley Effect' demonstrate how deeply invasive and intensely disturbing the gas industry is and how people power can turn things around. The social and environmental movement unites people from all walks of life, it is not an issue of the left-wing green parties, and it is an issue that is so life-threatening that every citizen concerned feels the injustice and the imposition of erroneous and immoral decisions from political leaders that are a slap in the face of their constituents. Wherever you look, community groups have sprung up in response to the CSG threat, and they are actively and verbally defending what is their right. The groups are networked and form alliances.

**“They are missing one key element, the people!”** says Julie Lyford of 'Groundswell Gloucester'. Almost 100% in community surveys say NO! to gas field exploration.

The Narrabri Gas Project will soon be in front of the Independent Planning Commission (IPC), the body that makes the final decision in the application process.

**CSG Free North West** is the alliance for the various anti-gas industry community groups who have declared the NW of NSW gas field free. Santos altogether has mapped 7 gas fields in NW NSW. The gas exploration license area covers the NW from the Queensland border

down to Dubbo and Muswellbrook. The Narrabri Gas Project is stage 1 of the future development.

### **The Spiritual Issue - 1000m –**

It is a fight for Australia, a fight for Mother Earth. The consequences of exposing gases and fuels to the earth and atmosphere, the destruction of forests, rivers, and wetlands, the dredging of sea bed to make room for LNG tankers that dock onto Curtis Island are enormous and far reaching. From the Great Artesian Basin aquifers below ground to the Great Barrier Reef of the Australian coast, the industry is the devil in disguise, a beast that needs to be defeated before the total destruction of the continent. Before the extinction rate is exhilarating to a non-stoppable catastrophe. If we are on the brink of ruin we still have capacity and energy to halt the worst scenario.

Ours must be a binding agreement, to protect the land that is giving us food and shelter.

**“If we destroy that we won’t have anything for our children and grandchildren”.** Aunt Mimmie.

**“This particular area of Gomaroi country is the heart. Everything is related, connected. We are one with the land.”** *Judy Kaye Knox, Gamilaraay – Gomaroi activist*

The drilling into aquifers deep into the layers of earth is disturbing the spirits and upsetting the spiritual connection to the land. This to me is the deepest and most devastating troubling consequence of gas exploration. These layers have been formed in prehistoric times. It is these periods of times unknown that have enabled life on earth, that are the foundations for organic life and the powerful launch pads for biological life. Processes of millions of years were necessary to give birth to the ecological diversity the planet is unique for. A kind of diversity not found yet on any of the other planets, simply because conditions are not favourable for complicated organic life forms. Planet earth has endeavoured and succeeded. This we owe to these processes that lay witness in the subterranean seams that support and sustain life on earth. These are the places that carry high spiritual value. To interfere with that is kicking the divine.

### **The Solution –1000m plus –**

Communities that are under threat of gas developments in their back yards need to ramp up solar power and put everything into the one future safe basket of building a strong renewable sector. It is of utter importance, politically, economically and socially, that affected communities, preferably with the support of regional councils, draw up a plan to lock in renewable energy as an off-grid project.

The fight is not just about keeping the nasty industries out, the fight must conclude with building community resources based on renewable clean green energy as a community-owned enterprise. It blocks the push for gas companies and they lose ground because they, and the state governments, cannot hold up their false argument that the gas is needed for households. Energy independent communities are less vulnerable to be stepped on, if they take it in their own hands to provide for themselves. This will also thwart the argument for job creation, because there are plenty of jobs – and lasting jobs – in setting up and sustaining renewable energy. On top of this, gas companies would have to be held to account, as the communities have a claim on the already destroyed land. A plan to oblige the companies to clean up their sites and remove wells, infra structure and waste, plus set aside repair funds that will go towards the installation of solar powered stations on these cleared patches where formerly the rigs were installed, will support the license for self-governing energy supply.

It is an empowerment that is long needed in an oppressive atmosphere of over-ruling community wishes where the consensus among the people on the ground has no weight with the decision making few in power. Decentralising essential services is the paramount protection against centralised energy supply and subsequent control of that supply. TransGrid is the new transmission network at work to pull community based and operated local renewables away from under their noses to keep a firm grip on energy supply. Touted as the next generation transition model, TransGrid is presumably locking in gas, coal and hydro for decades to come. Solar and wind renewable energy generation as part of the TransGrid network incorporated into the interstate electricity system by large base load substations will be in control of government agencies and state economy, undermining the independence of community based energy projects in the renewable sector. Correct me if I am wrong, but I see these efforts as steps to curb independent energy models, private as well as community owned off-grid renewable energy generation. The message to gas and coal companies is not just go away and stay away, its pay and go away. First pay (for cleaning up) then away!

Communities are mobilising to get the job done on renewable projects. If governments failed them, governments will keep failing them, and the change we so urgently need has to come from the heart of these communities. As bullies only react to strength, people need to be strong. Our future and our children's future are at stake.

**“Every life form will perish when they take the last drop of water.”** *Deborah Briggs-Griffen*