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SUBMISSION **to the proposed Gateway Process**

Introduction

The Clarence Environment Centre (CEC) has maintained a shop-front in Grafton for over 23 years, and has a proud record of environmental advocacy. We believe the appropriate provision of energy is at the very core of the solution to global warming, which compels us to comment on the above proposal because of its relationship to unconventional gas, and that fuel's potential contribution to climate change.

The CEC believes that Climate Change is real. Major catastrophic climate events have occurred with increased frequency over the past decade, many of which have been deemed to have broken all existing records, such as Hurricane Katrina, and Super storm Sandy in the USA, record floods in Pakistan, Thailand, and most of south east Asia, deadly fires in Victoria, killer tornadoes in the USA, and heat waves across both the southern and northern hemispheres, along with the Queensland floods and Cyclone Yasi, just to name a few. YES climate change is a reality.

Discussion

By using the term “safeguards” in relation to restrictions placed on where coal seam gas mining can and cannot occur, one would like to think that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier, the Hon Marie Ficarra MLC, concedes that the mining of unconventional gas is dangerous to human health and to the environment.

From research undertaken in the Northern Rivers district of NSW, it is known that more than 80% of the community are opposed to the establishment of gas fields in the area. In rural areas that opposition is greater than 90%, so the creation of these supposed exclusion zones, appears to have more to do with Government attempting to mollify the more than 90% of NSW residents whose homes will be “safeguarded” (the Government's terminology), and protected from the toxic effects of unconventional gas mining activities.

In the letter Ms Ficarra circulated in mid October on the new Gateway Process, she explains that, “*the NSW Government has listened to the community's concerns and introduced the toughest CSG laws in Australia*”. However, those “tough” laws only quarantine urban populations, land on which vineyards and horse studs are located, and strategic agricultural land, effectively hanging rural communities out to dry, and confirming that the Government cares little for their welfare.

The evidence of the negative impacts of unconventional gas mining has emerged from across the world. These include horizontal drilling, hydraulic fracturing of underground rock formations (fracking), multiple well head networks, injection underground of toxic chemicals that find their way into groundwater systems, and the draining of aquifers. There is also toxic produced water - lakes containing billions of litres which need to be treated by reverse osmosis desalination plants; the huge compressor stations; the flaring and venting of methane, and the unmeasurable fugitive emissions escaping from underground, and from every joint along the transport and processing corridor. Then there is the ultimate burning of that gas to produce energy, adding the final straw leading to catastrophic climate change.

Evidence of human and animal health impacts has also emerged, with widespread accounts of gas companies in the USA paying compensation, but insisting on recipients signing confidentiality agreements and declarations that they have not suffered ill health because of the gas drilling.

There is also the direct impact on the environment, with millions of hectares of native bushland being bulldozed along the way, fragmenting wildlife habitat and placing threatened species at risk of extinction. Rural communities will be decimated, people will suffer adverse health impacts, livestock will die and food production will be severely reduced.

Yes; this is a highly toxic industry, and the government needs to show caution. So why is this Government not displaying caution in relation to the vast majority of country NSW? The NSW Chief Scientist has already released an interim report identifying a range of problems, and the final report is still 6 to 8 months away. Yet licences are already being handed out for gas drilling in, of all places, the drinking water supply catchments of metropolitan Sydney, Newcastle and Central Coast communities. This is sheer madness.

When it comes to water quality, it has to be understood that underground water is everywhere. Every bore hole drilled for gas will encounter water, and that water is seldom static. It moves and it occurs at different levels. Any injection of chemicals into a bore hole will come into contact with water, a fact acknowledged by the industry, and although much of that water is pumped out for treatment, a large percentage of it will remain underground and continue to pollute for aeons. That is the risk the government appears willing to take for a short term injection of dollars into the economy.

Summary

Unconventional gas is a dirty fuel, with a carbon footprint equal to, if not greater than coal. Knowing the climate consequences of emitting that carbon, we firmly believe there can no justification for extracting that gas at the present time using current technology. We don't need it, and most of the citizens of NSW don't want it.

Reading about the aptly named “gateway process”, it is clear that is exactly what it is, a “gateway” to allow gas mining to gain a foothold in the state. The proposal is full of loopholes which will ultimately see the industry spread like a cancer across the countryside. Therefore we ask that the entire process be scrapped, and laws introduced to ban unconventional gas mining in this state.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to comment, and we hope that sanity will prevail.

Yours sincerely

John Edwards
Honorary Secretary