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Member for Clarence
The Hon. Chris Gulaptis
Prince Street
Grafton

Dear Chris

Coal seam gas mining and the science of climate change

At a recent anti coal seam gas (CSG) protest held outside your office, you rejected protesters' claims that the mining for unconventional gas poses unacceptable risks to water quality and human health, but indicated you would be happy to consider any "evidence" we could provide that the industry has had, or will have, negative environmental impacts.

At the same protest you declared that while you believed climate change is occurring, you did not agree with the scientific consensus that it is human induced through the burning of fossil fuels, your words being, "*I do have some reservations about the degree to which humans have been to blame*".

Nevertheless, all governments around the world have accepted the scientific evidence, including the Australian Government, and have committed to "addressing" greenhouse gas emissions, if not reducing them. Australia's commitment under the Kyoto protocol was, not to reduce emissions, but to keep emissions to an 8% **rise**, by 2020 above 1990 levels.

According to an article by Colin Hunt, Honorary Fellow in Economics at University of Queensland, published just 4 days ago, entitled "*Kyoto Protocol fails: get ready for a hotter world*", Kyoto was a dramatic failure, to the point where keeping the rise in global temperature to two degrees is now unachievable.

Australia's role in this disaster should not be understated. While hiding behind a claim that we produce less than 2% of world emissions, Australia has, according to Colin Hunt, seen its emissions rise by 105% since Kyoto. The government however, claims it will meet its Kyoto obligations, not through actions here, but through the purchase of 100 million tonnes of carbon offsets from overseas. The availability, and reliability, of such overseas offsets is unknown.

Two very pertinent reports were released in January of the this year. The first was delivered by the ultra-conservative International Energy Agency, delivering a stark warning that the world faces a 6 degrees of warming within 90 years if an immediate transition to non polluting renewable energy was not achieved.

It was a wake-up call that was widely ignored around the world in 2012, but Australia's response was highlighted by the second report, the Energy White Paper. From the outset the White Paper makes it clear that Australia has no plans to stop or even slow the growth of mining and export of coal and gas, boasting (page xiii) that: "*At current rates of depletion, Australia has many decades*

worth of known gas and uranium reserves, and at least a century of coal.” This means there are people alive today that will likely live to see a world with no fossil fuels, all of which will have been burned to contribute to a planet that is at least 6°C hotter (refer IEA Outlook 2012). This is a level of climate change that is described as “catastrophic”.

The Energy White Paper brags that “Australia is currently the world’s largest coal exporter... and in future years will be the world’s second-largest liquefied natural gas exporter”.

The Australian Government justifies this all-out push to sell off our natural resources by claiming (page xiii) that, “these exports will continue to support improved living standards for billions of people in our region”.

There is no consideration, or even mention, of the climatic consequences of this caring, unselfish act of charity to our less fortunate neighbours. There is no mention of the fact that most of the region from Pakistan to the Philippines have suffered unimaginable horrors from the worst floods in recorded history over the past 2 years. Nor any mention of the plight of Pacific Island nations drowning under sea level rise, and all the result of climate change through the past burning of those fossil fuels which has seen temperatures rise to date by less than 1 degree. The climate consequences of a 6 degree rise are beyond comprehension.

Enter the coal seam gas industry, claiming that CSG and other unconventional gas is the ideal energy source to replace coal in the transition to a carbon free future, and highlighting the fact that the emissions from burning natural gas is far less than coal. This was a cynical exercise in delivering misinformation, which completely ignores the massive emissions level when all the components of the unconventional gas production process are added together.

Cornell University scientists in the USA were the first to undertake this research more than 12 months ago, and concluded that the true carbon footprint of unconventional gas is at least equivalent to, if not greater, than the burning of coal. The only component of CSG carbon footprint that could not be accurately assessed was the fugitive emissions that escape through the soil directly into the air. These are, because of the random nature of their occurrence, difficult to locate, and impossible to accurately measure.

Last week, the Southern Cross University released preliminary findings, confirming what anyone who lives near an unconventional gas field already knows, that there are fugitive emissions that find their way into the atmosphere via the soil, rivers, and domestic water bores, following the underground hydraulic fracturing (fracking) of rock strata to release the gas.

The European Commission for the Environment has also recently released findings of a report it had commissioned, which showed that fracking imposes a high risk of ground and surface water pollution, a high risk of aquifer depletion, a high risk to human health, and high risks of numerous other detrimental impacts.

This is not a clean energy source, and your Government knows it, because the report from your own Inquiry into CSG, released earlier this year, identified that very fact.

On Tuesday of this week another of the world's ultra-conservative organisations, the World Bank, released a report it had commissioned from the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research and Climate Analytics, which repeated the International Energy Agency's warning about the impacts that continued fossil fuel burning will have on global climates, predicting a 4 degrees of warming within 50 years.

On Wednesday, Metgasco began work on a gas exploration drill site in the Coalstream wetlands catchment south of Grafton, the first in the Clarence Valley since the temporary moratorium on fracking, and the issuing of new licences, was lifted.

Throughout all of this, and in full knowledge of the consequences, the NSW Government remains steadfastly supportive of business as usual for this unbridled expansion of all fossil fuel mining.

Therefore, given all the above, and if you have any concern for future generations, we call on you as our representative to raise this matter in the Party Room, call for an immediate halt to the expansion of coal and gas mining across NSW, and work to phase out these industries altogether, replacing them with non polluting, renewable energy sources.

Yours sincerely

John Edwards
Honorary Secretary