



CLARENCE ENVIRONMENT CENTRE

31 Skinner Street

South Grafton 2460

Phone/ Fax: 02 6643 1863

Web site: www.cec.org.au

E-mail: admin@cec.org.au

Date: 17th January 2013

The Hon Chris Gulaptis
Member for Clarence

Dear Mr Gulaptis

Ongoing blockade against coal seam gas (CSG) at Glenugie

The Clarence Environment Centre is seriously concerned over the state government's failures in relation to unconventional gas mining in NSW in the face of overwhelming evidence of the catastrophic climate change consequences of burning that highly polluting type of gas.

We are also concerned for your constituents who now find themselves in a position where their properties are unsellable (nobody would buy land at a fair price in a potential gas-field), and if a gas field is developed these families will be forced to live with the disruption to their lives and livelihoods, not to mention potential health problems, for at least 20 years. There will be continuous coming and going of strangers on their properties, heavy machinery operating 24 hours a day at times, noise and dust and an endless stream of trucks removing toxic water from holding dams dug on their properties. Trees and other vegetation will be bulldozed from their land for a network of access roads and pipelines, and wildlife they love will move away.

Those people feel powerless and abandoned by the government and their elected representatives, and feel they have no option other than to take part in non violent protest, which is resulting in their being arrested, locked up and charged with the most trivial offences. Crimes to date include "tossing drinking water to a fellow protester", or "failing to move to allow another protester who was standing behind him to move". Sitting on the ground and linking arms is considered to be resisting arrest, and allows this to happen. I personally took the photograph and can vouch for what I witnessed.



This is the second time riot police have been called to your electorate in recent months. Neither incident could be described as a 'riot', and this latest was a peaceful, legal, non violent protest. These two participants, one a 16 year old boy, were only resisting having their heads driven into the bitumen. As it was, the father, who was loudly proclaiming that he was not resisting, received a nasty gash to the head, and the entire unsavoury incident was captured and aired on national TV. If that incident did not constitute "unreasonable force" the following treatment of a slightly built 65 year old woman certainly did:



Three riot squad police, one forcing her arm up behind her back, while another pins her to the ground with a knee between her shoulder blades. Her crime was trying to go to the aid of the the 16 year old who, in her mind, was being assaulted by the police, thus disobeying an order not to move. This incident, I'm sure, will now be resolved in court. Having said that, we applaud the actions of the vast majority of police who displayed appropriate restraint and courtesy.

However, if those images are distressing, it was nothing compared with the following:



This very frightened, tearful, and clearly distressed 10 year old girl, whose father was locked onto the underside of the truck urging her not to move, had to be forcibly removed by police. While the police were clearly sensitive to her plight, and certainly did not use excessive force in removing her, it was their actions leading up to that moment that contributed to the child's distress.



The family's protest was intended to highlight that they were 5th generation farmers, with three generations involved in the protest. The child was sitting on the utility with her aunt when the police asked the older woman to get down from the vehicle. Four other members of the family were 'locked on' under the vehicle, so there was no reason to remove the lady at that point.

However, her shake of the head was enough to warrant her arrest on a charge of disobeying a directive. She was led away having offered no resistance and locked in a cage in full view, 15 metres away (see left), leaving the child isolated and clearly scared and distressed.

Bystanders who tried to get closer to support the child were themselves threatened with arrest, and forced to watch on as the police proceeded to forcefully remove her from the vehicle.

While many will argue the appropriateness of involving young children in this type of action, it is nevertheless an indication of the desperation

that these families are feeling. These are members of your electorate and, as farmers, likely supported your candidature, so it is disappointing that you have not joined the growing list of dignitaries and elected representatives (Janelle Saffin, Jeremy Buckingham, Jan Barham, and Mayors Dowell, and Richardson, and Cr Basil Cameron from Byron that have already visited Glenugie to speak with, and listen to the concerns of local landowners.

As I have stressed previously, if a gas field is developed, those affected neighbours will have to live with the disruption to their lives and livelihoods, and the potential impacts on human health, for at least 20 years. The government's claim that it inherited the problem from the previous Labor Government is a cop out. There has always been the option to allow landowners to refuse to have a gas mine on their properties. You did it for wind farms, why not CSG?

Assurances that your government has "*introduced policies that are the most stringent in the country, if not the world*", do not change the plight of these landowners. Try to put yourself in their shoes. They were never consulted about whether they wanted their land turned into a gas field, they still have had no say, feel powerless, and abandoned by the government and their elected representatives, and as a result they see no option other than to keep up their non violent protest.

It is clear that community outrage is growing, and more and more of your constituents will end up being arrested by a clearly reluctant police force. Therefore I believe the latest warning to the US Government by the "National Climate Assessment and Development Advisory Committee" (see following email) should be taken seriously by all world governments, and an immediate halt called to all new mining of dirty fossil fuels like coal and unconventional gas.

I will be copying this to some of your colleagues and the Premier, in the hope that positive action will be taken to stop this insanity.

Yours sincerely

John Edwards
Honorary Secretary
Clarence Environment Centre