



## *Knitting Nannas Against Gas - Saving the land, air and water for the kiddies*

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To: The Select Committee on Unconventional Gas Mining

9 February, 2016

Knitting Nannas Against Gas  
PO Box 639  
LISMORE NSW 2480

Dear Select Committee

### **Reference: Select Committee on Unconventional Gas Mining**

We understand that the Select Committee is to inquire into “The adequacy of Australia’s legislative, regulatory and policy framework for unconventional gas mining including coal seam gas (CSG) and shale gas mining. The Knitting Nannas Against Gas (KNAG) was inaugurated in 2012 in the Northern Rivers of NSW. Since that time, a number of Loops have been established throughout Australia, and the United Kingdom. Many nannas have travelled to the Queensland gas fields on numerous occasions where they met with farmers, families, attended court hearings, and lent support to these families who had been severely impacted by having ‘wells’ and other gas mining infrastructure on or in close proximity to their homes/properties. We have followed the impacts of the unconventional gas industry in the USA over a number of years, and have educated ourselves very well over this time. We, as a disorganisation of mature elderly women, feel we are well qualified to respond to this inquiry. Our objective is to ‘save the land, air and water for the kiddies’. Our submission to the inquiry follows:

#### **a a national approach to the conduct of unconventional gas mining in Australia;**

Currently there is no ‘national approach’. The States have jurisdiction over the unconventional gas industry via the Petroleum (Onshore) Act 1991. State Regulations, supposedly the most highly regulated industry in the world, allow for industry to self-regulate, and even when serious breaches occur, the States basically give industry a slap on the wrist and generally a very small fine which is seen as a condoning of industry mismanagement and corruption.

#### **b the health, social, business, agricultural, environmental, landholder and economic impacts of unconventional gas mining;**

There are many published papers and reports on the real impacts on health, environment, economy, etc experienced in the USA. I am sure the senate committee will be accessing all research and reports on the unconventional gas industry world-wide, so we will concentrate on the real experience of the industry impact in Australia, more specifically in Queensland.

Health: In Queensland where the industry has been operating for approximately 20 years, the health impacts have been surveyed in the Tara/Chinchilla region where many families with young children relocated some years ago. A number of nannas accompanied Dr GERALYN McCARRON on one of her trips to the Tara Estate, and other affected areas in the region, and saw first hand some of the health symptoms on residents. Dr McCARRON has visited a number of families since 2012, and in 2013 she completed '*Symptomatology of a gas field - An independent health survey in the Tara rural residential estates and environs.*' Her study showed chemical toxicity in almost all of the people tested. This study was presented to the Queensland Government, but was seemingly ignored. (attachment 1)

Most families living in the gas fields rely on ground and tank water for drinking and irrigation. A number of water samples from different tanks has shown dangerous levels of toxic chemicals in the past 2 years, but as there were no baseline studies conducted prior to unconventional gas exploration, there is no link between contamination in the water and the industry. The same scenario is applicable to air quality. The fact is that the impacted families showed no sign of health issues prior to broad scale gas exploration and production. Dr McCARRON's report details findings which are frightening.

Access to clean water and air is a human right, yet these families are being denied both.

Gas wells and compression plants mainly operate 24/7. Landowners have expressed the effect on their mental health from the constant bright lights ("brighter than a football night match" said one of the landowners), noise and vibrations that prevent them from sleeping.

Social/Business: During some of these trips to the Queensland gas fields, nannas noticed a number of shops had closed down since the gas companies had established in the region. In Wandoan there were two new businesses, QGC and Oil Co of Australia, both gas companies. FIFO workers were not allowed to speak to locals. One woman FIFO worker went to a CWA meeting, and was then transferred out as she had been socialising with the 'locals'. All the local young people had left town, looking for better opportunities. This is what the locals told us, first-hand experience. Re drinking and drugs, during one of the court cases for an arrested protester, the Chinchilla magistrate stated she has more trouble with FIFO workers being charged with dangerous driving, drug and assault offences, and the number of road accident deaths had increased substantially.

Tara and Chinchilla townships are now experiencing a huge economic decline, shops closing, houses vacant, social issues etc. In some areas the workers rented houses, and the rent prices became so inflated that local residents could not afford to rent. In other areas the workers were housed in 'man camps' which were completely self-catering, thus local businesses did not benefit from the influx of workers. Now that many of the FIFOs have left, many the houses built and rented out to them are left vacant.

Agricultural: During a visit to the Queensland gas fields by a number of nannas in 2012, we met a woman named \_\_\_\_\_ who had a pipeline going through her property. She told us that it was supposed to take 3 months to build, when we saw her it had been 20 months and was still unfinished. Her cattle and sheep were only able to access half of

her land, and of course the pasture on that half was all eaten down. The other half was lush with feed, but she had no feasible way of getting her cattle and sheep to this land. Sometimes the calves would go under the unburied pipe and get separated from their mothers.        would have to drive her quad bike about 10 kms there and back to bring the calves back. Some cattle and sheep got stuck in the mud next to the pipe, sometimes starving and baking to death. During this visit        told us she was having to sell out to get the money to take the industry to court for breach of contract. Another case which received international media coverage was the suicide of George Bender, who had been battling the industry for 10 years. His daughter is now taking up his fight.

Environmental: Evidence of spills, water contamination, and toxic air is having a disastrous effect on the natural environment. Clearing large tracts of land to establish well pads and infrastructure, sometimes clearing endangered habitat is having a long-term negative impact on the environment. Because of the nature of the type of mining, there has to be a large network of wells, effectively cutting up the farmers land, clearing or reducing state forests etc. Generally the regulating body of each State does little but a slap on the wrist for major spills etc (Santos in Pilliga). Our nanna Pat Schulz had a bigger fine for protesting than Santos had for a major spill of toxic chemicals. That land is still contaminated.

Landholder: The gas companies often misrepresented what they were planning on doing on their land, so landowners sometimes had wells and other mining infrastructure which had not been disclosed to them. In Queensland landholders have no right to say no to industry coming onto their land.

Economic: It appears the only economic benefit of the unconventional gas industry, is to the industry itself and the State governments. There is enough evidence available that the industry is unsafe, yet governments in most States are pushing for the industry. With the falling global price for fossil fuels it makes good sense for Australia to support development of renewables. They are doing everything but, with the Federal government all but ignoring the global move to reduce CO<sub>2</sub>, and still having coal in the mix for base load energy.

With regard to the mining industry providing jobs into the future, this cannot be substantiated anywhere the unconventional gas industry is operational. In the Northern Rivers where Metgasco was exploring, they supposedly invested \$120 million over a 10 year period, but most of the jobs were with interstate drilling companies, seismic testing companies, and materials purchased out of the region. In Gloucester where AGL promised jobs, all workers were shipped in from Haliburton.

In Queensland, Tara and Chinchilla townships are now experiencing a huge economic decline, shops closing, houses vacant, social issues etc. In some areas the workers rented houses, and the rent prices were so inflated that local residents could not afford to rent. In other areas the workers were housed in 'man camps' which were completely self-catering, thus local businesses did not benefit from the influx of workers. Now that many of the FIFOs have left, all the houses built and rented out to them are left vacant.

#### **c government and non-Government services and assistance for those affected;**

We are not aware of any government assistance for those affected in NSW or Queensland, the two States licensing the unconventional gas industry. In NSW we have

recently had the government buyback a number of exploration licences, one of them closing down Metgasco, and AGL has just pulled out of Gloucester. Neither government has offered assistance to families impacted by the industry. Also many Members of Parliament have not stood up for their electorate on this issue. The Environmental Defenders Office (EDO) is a non-Government organisation who has, and continues to represent families, protesters etc who take a stand against industry, and the KNAG hold fundraisers to support the EDO in its valuable work.

**d compensation and insurance arrangements;**

A number of affected families have been bought out, but in doing so have had to sign non-disclosure agreements, silencing them. Health insurance is not affordable to many of the affected families. House insurance is also not affordable due to the risks posed by industry.

**e compliance and penalty arrangements;**

The unconventional gas industry is self-regulated.

**f harmonisation of federal and state/territory government legislation, regulations and policies;**

What harmonisation? The Federal Water Trigger mechanism has now been transferred back to the States, the Federal government washing their hands of the responsibility of policing the industry. Different States have different regulations, but they all condone industry failures.

**g legislative and regulatory frameworks for unconventional gas mining in comparable overseas jurisdictions;**

We are not aware of overseas jurisdictions. Fracking has been banned in Scotland, Wales, France, New York, Colorado, Texas, California, Bulgaria, Germany, Netherlands, and a moratorium is in place in some parts of Canada, and USA.

**h the unconventional gas industry in Australia as an energy provider;**

BHP has reserves of gas from the Bass Strait which it supplies to other States. There is no shortage of gas despite NSW continuously saying we are running out of gas. Most of the gas produced in Queensland is shipped overseas. KNAG is promoting renewables as the only alternative to fossil fuel energy.

**i the current royalty and taxation arrangements associated with unconventional gas mining; and**

We are not aware of the current arrangements, but refer to The Australia Institute - Mining the age of Entitlement. <http://www.tai.org.au/content/mining-age-entitlement> 'Each state provides millions of dollars' worth of assistance to mining industries every year, with the big mining states of Queensland and Western Australia routinely spending over one billion dollars in assistance. This paper is the first attempt to put a dollar figure on the value of state assistance to the mining industry. It shows that over a six-year period, state governments in Australia spent \$17.6 billion supporting the mineral and

fossil fuel industries. Queensland's assistance was by far the largest of all states, totalling \$9.5 billion, followed by Western Australia's at \$6.2 billion.'

**j any related matter.**

As stated above, Knitting Nannas Against Gas has full confidence that renewables are the energy of the future, and promote renewables every opportunity.

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