

Submission to the Senate's Rural Affairs and Transport References Committee Inquiry into management of the Murray Darling Basin examining the impact of mining coal seam gas on the management of the basin.

This submission is made on behalf of the State Social Justice Committee of St Vincent De Paul Society of Queensland by its Chairman, Stephen Doyle  
with the support of the Society's State  
President, Mr Brian Moore.

Through communication from volunteer workers of our Society and recent media attention concern has been raised within our committee regarding the development of coal seam gas extraction in the Surat Basin. This concern centres around significant adverse impacts on the social and economic well-being of affected communities as well as the environmental sustainability of the affected prime agricultural lands. With the forecast large scale development of this gas field it is most likely that these impacts will be magnified in the near future.

Our concern is such that the Society's State President, Mr Brian Moore wrote to the then Queensland Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy, Mr Stephen Robertson on 11 May 2011 requesting the minister to suspend the granting of further applications for drilling rights until the following issues were addressed and resolved to the satisfaction of the communities thus affected.

- The effect on existing water supplies
- The effect on the cost of rental accommodation
- Disruption of the social fabric of the local communities caused by the influx of large numbers of transitory workers
- The pressure on Health and Education services in the area
- Interference with the infrastructure of the local communities
- The affect on the economic well being of the local landowners
- The satisfactory disposal of byproduct water and minerals (in particular salt).
- The wide spread belief that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has failed to fulfill its obligations under the Mineral Resources Act and the Petroleum Act, especially with regard to monitoring of ground water levels which may be affected by gas extraction.
- Equitable compensation to landowners on a community wide basis.

All of these concerns match with the inquiry's terms of reference and were seen as impacting very seriously on the human and financial resources of our Society and those of many other charities if they were not adequately addressed and managed before the proposed full scale of this industry. Neither the minister's reply nor recent developments which have added concerns about the direct impact on the health of the local population in mining areas and a threat to the security of future food production in these areas have given us reason to believe these concerns are being adequately addressed.

There are now many groups expressing concern about the future development of coal seam gas mining in Australia who can support these concerns with valid scientific arguments and reference to the history of destructive effects of this industry on overseas locations. Our concerns are born out of the stories from individuals with whom our society has day to day contact. I attach two documents for your perusal in regard to those stories. One is from a volunteer worker in Tara

which was published in the May edition of our Social Justice Bulletin and the other is from a rural family and was supplied to us by Dr Mark Copeland, the Social Justice Coordinator for the Toowoomba Catholic Diocese.

Attachment1 – Social justice Bulletin May 2011



# St Vincent de Paul Society

## SOCIAL JUSTICE

*good works*

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### **SOCIAL JUSTICE (MAKE IT HAPPEN):**

The SVDP Social Justice Committee and Conferences have been investigating the vested interests in Coals Seam Gas (CSG) projects and the alleged disregard for environment, human health, food security, water preservation and regional peoples' lives. This month's newsletter contains the reality of CSG today; please find herewith a regional case study and testimonial from a SVDP volunteer opposed to the mandate of approving wide-scale CSG at the expense of our health. We have an opportunity to present a unified voice in support of the moderation of CSG. Any project should be assessed according to its sustainability for 7 future generations; and it is becoming increasingly clear that mass approval of CSG is ill-conceived and myopic with long-term repercussions.

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My name is Debbi Orr,

I volunteer at the St Vincent De Paul shop in Tara every Thursday. I have 5 children, 3 girls and 2 boys ranging from 3 to 19 years in age. My 3 year old Jacinta comes with me to the shop on Thursdays and has done so ever since she was first born. She has become quite well known by the locals. I am involved in the group Western Downs Alliance, and we are fighting the expansion of the Coal Seam Gas Industry into the rural residential estates in Tara. This expansion is being carried out with permission from the State and Federal Governments even though they know of the problems caused by this industry in the gas fields of the United States.

No studies of the possible health problems caused by this industry has been undertaken, even though Health Authorities from the U.S have listed the many and varied illnesses suffered by residents living in/near gas fields. No testing of the chemicals used in this industry (21 of 23) has been carried out by our governments. Our Government already recognises (as stated in the Coordinator General's report) that we are already being impacted by the CSG industry. And they are allowing this industry to continue in residential areas, where there are PEOPLE. The Government and CSG companies do not even use the word 'people' - their term is 'sensitive receptors'. (I guess by not seeing us as people, we don't matter.)

QGC is currently under investigation for spraying untreated polluted water on our local gravel roads. QGC are also the subject of court actions for ignoring their contractual obligations. When negotiating land access QGC talk landowners into signing inadequate compensation agreements using the threat of land court. Some landowners are already suffering from health issues including nausea, headaches, nose bleeds and skin rashes etc., believed to be caused by the small amount of gas infrastructure in place at the moment. Imagine the impacts when the project is finished. Another problem is the constant noise, vibration and dust issues from drilling. CSG companies drill 24/7. Some CSG companies won't put their workers camps within 3km of a drill rig due to the dust and noise issue. However the same drill site can be placed 200 meters from our homes.

Our homes have been devalued and are unsalable, we cannot afford to move. Many residents have just walked away from their properties as they don't want to risk the health impacts. Our only option has been to take on this industry, protesting against them at every turn. Subjugation is the order of the day as police brought in by Government and QGC harass and intimidate residents protesting against CSG activities. We have been threatened with a \$50,000 fine if we impede a mining activity and yet QGC were fined \$19800 for ignoring their environmental authority on three occasions, that's only \$6600 for each breach. The CSG industry has caused a division within the community: businesses that are benefiting from CSG are against US, whilst those who are protesting against this industry, US, the people who are directly impacted from this industry are left helpless.

Concerns over the CSG industry have become a national issue, with the Lock The Gate Alliance being formed. The Alliance is made up of over 80 grassroots organizations, who are trying to protect not only homes, but valuable grazing and cropping land and damage to our Great Artesian Basin.



## **JUSTICE QUOTE:**

INTEGRATED COMMUNITIES HAVE: A MINDSET TO SEE NEW POSSIBILITIES; A HEART FOR OTHERS; A WILLINGNESS TO EMBRACE CHANGE; AND A SPIRIT OF VITALITY AND MATURITY.

### Andy Marks' Visit 7 April

On Thursday 7 April 2011 we hosted a visit from Dr Andy Marks, the Senior Research Officer from SVDP NSW in conjunction with the Mental Health Committee. Andy presented two workshops, which were attended by 40 members from across the state. The workshops focussed on Problem Gambling and Mental Health Literacy – the subjects of two recent research publications by Dr Marks. There was general agreement that Dr Marks' presentations were interesting, informative and highly effective in raising awareness regarding the extent of the gambling problem in our communities and its relevance to the work of our Society in assisting those who can least afford its harmful effects. Likewise the importance of an accurate knowledge and understanding of the issues relating to mental

health and the assistance available in our communities were conveyed most effectively in the second presentation.

PowerPoint presentations which accompanied Dr Marks' addresses are available on request from [social.justice@svdpqld.org.au](mailto:social.justice@svdpqld.org.au) and video footage of Dr Mark's presentation on Problem Gambling will soon be made available online using the new VOLT video viewing application at <http://volt.svdpqld.org.au>. Unfortunately technical difficulties prevented us from getting a full video copy of the Mental Health Literacy presentation but the PowerPoint contains all the relevant information.

### Energy and Water Ombudsman

Energy Ombudsman Queensland (EOQ) has provided a vital dispute resolution service to almost 40,000 Queenslanders for the past three and a half years. Since January 2011, EOQ was expanded to include water complaints from Allconnex Water, Queensland Urban Utilities and Uniwater customers in South East Queensland.

Energy and Water Ombudsman Queensland (EWOQ) can assist all residential water customers and small businesses whose water consumption is less than 100 kilolitres per year with issues such as bills, credit, customer service, restricted supply, customer connections and sewerage blockages and spills. However they cannot investigate complaints about price or water quality. So far almost 400 people have been assisted with their water and wastewater disputes in South East Queensland while assistance to small energy customers across all of Queensland has been continued.

To help people with common water complaints new fact sheets and brochures have been created for culturally and linguistically diverse residents.

Copies of these publications can be obtained by calling 1800 662 837, email [marketing@ewoq.com.au](mailto:marketing@ewoq.com.au) or online at [www.ewoq.com.au/publications\\_&\\_media.cfm](http://www.ewoq.com.au/publications_&_media.cfm).

If you need to make a complaint, or a complaint on someone else's behalf, please phone 1800 662 837, email [complaints@ewoq.com.au](mailto:complaints@ewoq.com.au) or complete the online complaint form at [www.ewoq.com.au](http://www.ewoq.com.au).

### **How do I write to my MP?**

a) The address of all state members can be found at:

[http://www.qgd.qld.gov.au/legislative\\_assembly.html#addresses](http://www.qgd.qld.gov.au/legislative_assembly.html#addresses)

b) The address of all federal members can be found at:

<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/members/memlist.pdf>

1 Dattner, F., Grant, J. & Luscombe, K. (1999) *Three Spirits of Leadership – Seeking the United Voice of the Entrepreneur, the Corporation and the Community*. Australia. Business and Professional Publishing Pty Limited.

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Attachment 2 – Lloyd Family Case Study supplied by Dr Mark Copeland, Social Justice Coordinator, Toowoomba Catholic Diocese

## Farming and Mining

### The Lloyd Family's Story

For over 40 years the Lloyd family has lived and owned Wieambilla, a 7500 acre property south west of Chinchilla located in the thick of Origin and QGC's CSG developments. With a 5000 head beef cattle feedlot and a backgrounding and mixed farming operation the concept of co-existence is an issue that the Lloyds personally most certainly question.

The Lloyds involvement with the CSG industry came in 2000 when they were approached by both Origin and QGC who were keen to undertake some exploratory investigations on their tenements that fell over their property. With no knowledge, and little information available of this emerging industry the Lloyds were sceptical. "We were cautious but I think we, like so many others, were naive. We had no comprehension over what was to come and basically had to rely on the word of the company representative," Katie Lloyd said. "Some of these people were ruthless; they made some outlandish statements and certainly got off on the wrong foot with us."

With seven exploration wells and an evaporation pond already scattered over the property, it was in 2006 that QGC approached the family to discuss full scale development which would include up to 25 wells, 20km gravel access roads, 10km of underground pipelines and an additional 7.2km pipeline running through the centre of the property. "We were not interested. We could see the damage this proposal meant and the huge impact it would have on both our business and our lifestyle. It would limit us in our future planning and would make some of our ideas completely impossible and this was a risk we were not prepared to take," Katie said. "Signing off on this agreement would have given us around \$25,000 a year in compensation, increasing with CPI for the life of the project. For the impact this proposal would generate, we considered the compensation a long way off the mark." Subsequently QGC decided to shift their focus to developments elsewhere.

Discussions with Origin commenced in 2008 who outlined their plans to developing their tenement. It included the construction of 15 new wells (on top of their four exploration wells), 15km of gathering pipelines and 17.3km of gravel roads. Negotiations were long and emotionally tough and an agreement was eventually finalised in early 2009. "My parents-in-law signed off on this agreement and they believed they were put in a position where they had no choice but to sign. Origin had time constraints and the threat of land court was being thrown around. By this point they were exhausted and just wanted it to be over and done with," Katie stated.

Having lived through full scale development Katie and Scott believe there are so many impacts that just simply are not accounted for in a compensation agreement. "So often we're



told that this is an unobtrusive industry, just a small hole in the ground, but we don't buy that. People need to be aware that even after full scale development you have people, machinery and foreign vehicles always coming onto your property checking, repairing, and maintaining things. You have ongoing phone calls and it's in your best interest to be aware of what is going on at all times. In the 20 months since development commenced things remain pretty constant," Katie said.

Scott and Katie's biggest concern lies around that of underground water. With a 100 per cent reliance on groundwater for their feedlot and an already noted decline in water at two of their bores they can't help but worry. "Water is everything and this resource simply cannot be compromised. We have been working closely with the companies and the relevant government departments over this issue however don't feel any more confident," Scott said. "The clear message to date has been that CSG is the least likely reason as to why our bore water has declined; they all conclude that is more to do with drought or overuse. We have serious trouble accepting this notion considering we already have 165 CSG wells located on or within a 5km radius and so little data available to us about the existence of each."

One of the largest issues Scott and Katie find hard to comprehend is that of uncertainty. Their reservations over the CSG industry has certainly made them question their own long-term business objectives. "We believe we have a property and a business with a lot of potential and we are at a point in our lives where we are keen to start thinking about putting some of these plans into action. We have opportunities to expand our feedlot, to develop an irrigation licence that would further enhance our farming operation, and make vast improvements to our cattle backgrounding practices. However these are all opportunities that come at a huge expense to us.

With no assurance over our the future of our groundwater, and knowing that further CSG development on our property is yet to come, we just cannot commit to these huge investments. The risk is far too great at this stage," Katie said.

Any development comes at a risk and the Lloyds believe their biggest asset, their land, has already been compromised by CSG development. "Devaluation of a property by CSG development is a taboo subject in the CSG world; it's something they refuse to acknowledge or believe. We've had gas representatives tell us that some banks consider a gas well a bonus, guaranteed income as such, but that overall loss is something that annual compensation, in its current low form, will never ever replace," Scott said. "Our land valuer even admitted that we had to ensure that our compensation was at a level where it acted as a carat so we could somehow retain our market share and he agreed that our current compensation was a long way off that mark."

Retaining staff is another huge concern for the Lloyds who currently employ six people from around the Chinchilla region. "We value our staff incredibly and are determined to retain them because of their expertise however because of the huge money being paid by the CSG industry we have to be extremely competitive. Our wages have increased by 35% in the last four years but the reality is there is only so far we can go. It will get to the point where it becomes unviable," Scott added.

As landholders the Lloyds get tired of hearing the rave reviews this industry gets; the benefits it brings and the huge boost it will be to Queensland's dire economy. "This development on our land was not something we would have ever agreed to had we had that choice. We are not lulled by the gravel roads or the paltry compensation and we honestly cannot see any benefit to us as landowners," Katie stated. "I accept that there are short-term benefits this industry brings in terms of jobs and dollars, and that perhaps it will save a few rural communities, but to us, our priority lies on the impacts and effects this industry will have on our family, our lifestyle, our business and our future. We landowners are at the forefront of this industry and I believe we have the most at stake. Unfortunately this is something the Government, the CSG industry and its employees simply do not understand or simply refuse to acknowledge."