

17 April 2012

Ms S Dunstone
Acting Committee Secretary
Senate Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee
Via Email: ec.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Ms Dunstone

**Inquiry into the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation
Amendment (Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and
Large Coal Mining Development) Bill 2012**

The National Farmers' Federation (NFF) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on the above inquiry.

It is fair to say that coal seam gas and coal mine developments on the Eastern seaboard has attracted a significant amount of community concern arising from poorly informed decisions or lack of credible information that the community can obtain. Communities and farmers are concerned about potential impacts to land use, water, fracking, well integrity and the fracking or geogenic chemicals.

Therefore, the NFF strongly supports the current endeavours of the Australian Government seeking to improve the situation. This includes the Bill currently before the Parliament to establish an independent body to provide advice to governments, as well as the work program established under the Standing Committee on Energy and Resources to develop a Nationalised Framework for Coal Seam Gas industry.

However, it should be noted that while the coal seam gas and coal mining industries are the targets, other energy and mining sectors might also have similar impacts. For example, it is understood that geothermal energy production will use significantly more water than may be extracted by the coal seam gas industry. NFF would seek to ensure that provisions establishing the Independent Expert Scientific Committee (the Committee) can be sufficiently flexible to ensure that Governments can also seek their advice on a range of other matters that may impact now or in the future.

Of particular concern are new technologies such as underground coal gasification, which are proving less than compliant with high potential negative impacts. The Bill must ensure that the Committee covers this industry.

NFF notes that the Committee will provide advice when governments consider “applications” for these types of developments. Community and farmer concerns also relate to exploration as well as the production of gas and coal. NFF urges this Inquiry to ensure that the provisions enable governments to seek the advice of the Committee in relation to exploration.

Finally, the NFF seeks to ensure that the water use of any development includes licensed use as well as co-produced water, i.e. water that is treated as a waste product. This will ensure that when the Committee is assessing on the basis of sustainability, all water use is included. This is currently not the case in some states.

Yours sincerely

MATT LINNEGAR
Chief Executive Officer