

# **AUSTRALIAN GREENS ADDITIONAL COMMENTS**

1.1 The Australian Greens are pleased that our amendments to the terms of reference enabled the inquiry to focus on coal seam gas and on retaining federal environmental approval powers, alongside legal, social and economic matters of relevance to Queensland.

1.2 We supported the establishment of this inquiry because of the extent of attacks on the environment and civil liberties that the Newman Government was inflicting on Queensland, which lacks an upper house as a check and balance on executive power. In the course of discussions with the then Palmer United Party Senators regarding this inquiry, we are pleased that we were able to convince them of the logic of also opposing the Abbott Government's plan to give further environmental powers to the Newman Government. We Greens are proud that we secured an agreement with the Palmer United Party to block Tony Abbott's plan to hand federal approval powers over to state governments, and that we expanded the scope of the terms of reference for the inquiry so that it could investigate environmental attacks of both the Newman and Bligh governments.

1.3 The Australian Greens welcome the majority report and support all of its recommendations, and make some additional recommendations to further address these issues.

1.4 The Australian Greens wish to thank the witnesses and those who made submissions to the Committee. We particularly wish to note the courage of coal seam gas whistleblower Simone Marsh, whose testimony and submission have now been largely made public by the Committee and which tells a sorry tale of the power of the fossil fuel sector over government. The passion of witnesses and the volume of submissions in this inquiry highlight the truly divisive nature of the Newman LNP government and its harmful policy agenda. It was disgraceful that witnesses were so frequently treated with disdain or subjected to verbal harassment by Coalition Senators participating in the inquiry and to those witnesses at early hearings, the Greens again extend our apologies for such poor behaviour. The absence of Coalition Senators in the later hearings ensured proceedings ran in the more traditional, civil, manner.

## **Coal seam gas**

1.5 Coal seam gas, shale gas and tight gas threaten our land, water, climate and rural communities. For these reasons the Greens have long opposed this dangerous industry and advocated for clean, renewable energy generation in its stead.

1.6 Queenslanders were the test bunnies for the coal seam gas industry, and it was an honour to give regional Queenslanders a platform to share their horrific experience with this industry to date. For too long the plight of these people has fallen upon the deaf ears of the big parties, despite the efforts of the Greens in federal and state Parliaments.

1.7 We are thrilled that allowing the evidence of the dangers of coal seam gas to be aired in the inquiry has led to more Senators now realising what a gamble this risky industry is with our land, water, climate and communities.

1.8 We acknowledge the Chair's call for a moratorium and a royal commission into the health impacts of CSG. However, the Australian Greens believe that this does not go far enough. The evidence about the dangerous impacts of this industry is very clear. Likewise the solution is clear: unconventional gas, which is coal seam gas, shale and tight gas, should be banned. In the absence of such a ban, landholders including traditional owners and local councils should have the right to say 'no' to coal and gas mining on their land.

1.9 Since 2011 the Australian Greens have introduced three bills to the federal Parliament which would give landholders the right to say 'no' to coal and gas. We have received no support, and on 6 March 2014, the Liberal, National and Labor parties unanimously voted down one iteration of that bill.

1.10 I recently reintroduced the *Landholders Right to Refuse (Gas and Coal) Bill 2015* to the Senate. Importantly, the bill now includes a ban on hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking", as well as giving landholders including traditional owners and local councils the right to say 'no' to coal and gas mining on their land. Given the increasing community concern and the scientific uncertainty associated with this industry, on the driest inhabited continent on the planet, we hope that ultimately more parties in the Parliament will see the necessity of passing this bill.

1.11 The Australian Greens note with extreme disappointment that despite signing on to the majority report in most instances, the Australian Labor Party has not agreed to recommendations 17, 18 and 20 relating to coal seam gas and a ban on fracking in the majority report. In this they are joined by the Liberal and National parties who also refuse to constrain coal seam gas and are willing to let it rip across our best food producing land, tearing communities apart and threatening our precious water supplies. We note that each of those big parties accepts large donations from coal seam gas companies.

### **Recommendation 1**

**1.12 That unconventional gas, including coal seam gas, shale gas and tight gas be banned.**

### **Recommendation 2**

**1.13 In the absence of a comprehensive ban on unconventional gas, that federal Parliament pass the Greens' *Landholders Right to Refuse (Gas and Coal) Bill 2015* which bans fracking for unconventional gas and gives landholders including traditional owners and local councils the right to say 'no' to coal and gas mining on their land.**

### **Federal environmental laws**

1.14 Retaining national oversight of environmental protection is crucial to safeguard our precious places and native wildlife. We Greens have since 2011 fought the proposal, initially from the Gillard Labor Government and later from the Abbott

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Government, to give away federal environmental approval powers to states and territories. The inquiry report into my bill to prevent this hand-off of powers as well as the subsequent inquiry report into the Abbott Government's bill to worsen the scope of the hand-off, address in great detail the risks of handing off powers and outline why the Greens will continue to fight to keep federal environmental protections.

1.15 The witnesses to this inquiry reminded all Senators of the importance of federal environmental protections. We welcome the re-affirmation of previous commitments from the Chair and Opposition Senators to oppose any hand over of federal approval powers under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* to State and Territory governments.

### **Recommendation 3**

**1.16 That the federal Parliament remove the ability of the Environment Minister to ever hand over federal approval powers under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* to State or Territory Governments, in line with Greens' previous bills and amendments to various legislation.**

### **Stradbroke Island**

1.17 We welcome the Committee's focus on sand mining on Stradbroke Island and majority recommendations regarding this matter. The traditional owners of North Stradbroke Island as well as passionate residents and environmentalists have fought a long campaign against self-interested governments and overseas mining companies to end this harmful industry, and deserve support. Sustainable tourism and other local industries are the future of North Stradbroke Island.

### **Recommendation 4**

**1.18 To protect the natural values of North Stradbroke Island and further support the tourism industry, that sand mining on Stradbroke Island be phased out by 2019.**

### **Recommendation 5**

**1.19 That the federal Environment Minister call in the expansion of Sibelco's Enterprise mine under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.**

### **Cleaning up politics**

1.20 The Australian Greens support immediate reform of Queensland's Crime and Corruption Commission (the CCC) to restore its independence and capacity to tackle serious corruption. There are allegations, including serious questions in relation to the 2010 approvals of two vast coal seam gas projects in western Queensland, which have not been adequately investigated by the CCC or its predecessor, the Crime and Misconduct Commission.

1.21 This inquiry has touched on many federal matters, and it is increasingly clear that while the potential for serious corruption exists at all levels of government, there is no independent body with the capacity to tackle corruption at a federal level. The

Greens have for many years supported the establishment of a national Independent Commission Against Corruption as reflected in our *National Integrity Commission Bill 2013*. Now more than ever such a body is required.

**Recommendation 6**

**1.22 That the federal Parliament pass the Greens' *National Integrity Commission Bill 2013*.**

1.23 The Australian Greens wish to thank the Secretariat for their assistance and professionalism throughout this inquiry.

**Senator Larissa Waters**