

SUBMISSION FOR SENATE ENQUIRY re:- MINING ISSUES IN THE MURRAY-DARLING BASIN

A GROUP OF LANDHOLDERS IN THE DARLING DOWNS REGION WAS FORMED IN 2007, DUE TO CONCERNS ABOUT COAL SEAM GAS EXTRACTION IN THE DALBY AREA. THEY FORMED THE **EPPA** (ENVIRONMENT AND PROPERTY PROTECTION ASSOCIATION).

The EPPA has many environmental concerns that include:-

- **Water And Salt**

I have been informed by a reputable managerial level source working for Arrow Energy that up to 20,000 wells would be needed to produce enough methane gas to run one of the planned gas liquefaction plants in Gladstone. There are plans to build three of these plants in Gladstone.

In our region 20000 wells would produce 2340 mgs of water per day (average bore output is estimated at 117000l/day-1000barrels/day) of which the average saline content is 5000p/m (11700 t salt/day). It follows that a field of 20000 wells would extract 854 gigalitres (Sydney Harbour is reported to hold 500 gigalitres) of saline water, containing 4.25 million tonnes of salt a year. Arrow Energy is yet to provide us with a development plan for our area, and therefore we have had to rely on comments by their employee to allow us to correlate this information.

The EPPA is quite concerned about the ramifications to our local environment as well as the Murray-Darling Basin. Obviously the water and salt issue must be resolved before any large scale development occurs.

There have been inadequate scientific studies done relating to our shallower underground aquifers (namely the Condamine alluviums). A report used by State Government departments (Coal seam gas Water management study-Parsons Brinckerhoff-2004) to justify Govts' approach to coal seam gas development has been discredited by the people who produced the report. Departmental Officers in Qld's Natural Resources and Water department have informed landholders that they believe that the Condamine Alluviums are interrelated with the coal seam aquifers. Monitoring wells indicate this fact, however all information is currently being ignored.

The Condamine Alluviums not only support a vibrant irrigation industry, but supply water to many of the towns and hamlets on the Darling Downs. The Condamine Alluviums are in

danger of being degraded or polluted due to this large scale water extraction of the coal seam aquifers. Precedents have been set in the Powder River Basin in the U.S. Once coal seam gas extraction finalises in 30 or 40 years, the Darling Downs could become a waste land if the underground water is destroyed. **The Darling Downs is currently a highly productive agricultural region and should be protected from any future mining developments.**

- **Flood Plains**

The Central Darling Downs comprises of a large area of flood plain. Landholders consider that coal seam gas infrastructure will interfere with natural water flows. Infrastructure will include roads (for wet weather access to wells), trenching (subsidence) and wells. This infrastructure could cause change of water flow, erosion, silting of streams and rivers, resulting in serious environmental and economic damage.

- **Monitoring**

The EPA in Qld is seen as an ineffectual organisation by the EPPA. Our association is asking for full independent monitoring of all coal seam gas activities. Currently monitoring of coal seam gas exploration is basically carried out by the companies themselves. Reports from contractors and other employees suggest “cowboy” practices at best are sometimes carried out. The mining companies must be independently monitored for all facets of their operations in order to safeguard our environment.

The departmental head of the EPA (Ian Wilson) stated in Dalby at a recent forum that he was prepared to take a calculated gamble that shallower aquifers would not be damaged. Ian also stated that he was a geologist. How can the Head of the **Environmental Protection Agency** make such a statement? Is Ian going to shoulder the burden of responsibility if the aquifers are damaged? I take a few calculated gambles whilst farming, and I can guarantee you the outcome of such gambles is sometimes disastrous.

The EPA and the Department of Mines and Energy were oblivious to the salt issue until a delegation from our group went to Brisbane to inform them of the problem. In fact they met us with a supercilious attitude until we asked them to do a few figures on their note pads. The EPPA is of the opinion that Govt employees are instructed to develop coal seam gas extraction, with little or no thought of environmental issues/studies, or regard for the local populace, and indeed for the future of food production in our country.

- **Solutions**

The EPPA requires that all mining developments be kept off highly productive land. The Govt is constantly reminding us of mining being good for the State as a whole. Our Association

states that highly productive land will produce food for eternity, and should be protected from any deleterious activities.

A large area of unproductive land borders the Darling Downs. This land consists of mainly large areas of government forestry leases which the mining companies are either unable to, or don't want to access. Mining companies should be encouraged to develop these areas, **after** a proper scientific study is produced on aquifer interrelationship.

All water is to be treated to an acceptable standard and provided to the community and agriculture.

Salt is to be either reinjected into the coal seam aquifer, or a final solution is to be found that won't harm the environment.

Containment ponds for holding untreated water should be regulated in size and lined to minimise leaching.

Landholders must be compensated adequately for csg infrastructure. Csg infrastructure must be an asset to a property. In the U.S. it is claimed that csg infrastructure devalues a property by 22% (BCC Consultancy). Currently negotiations regarding compensation are one sided, with threat and coercion the main components of csg companies dialogue. Amounts mentioned for compensation (of course settlements are finalised due to lack of landholders rights) are a pittance, and totally unrealistic. Devaluation of properties affects equity, and could put landholders in financial stress.

Regards,

Bruce Derrick

Chairman EPPA.