

Executive Director

Resources and Industry Policy

Department of Planning and Environment

GPO Box 39

SYDNEY NSW 2001

15 July 2015

**Re – Mining State Environmental Planning Policy Amendment**

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission in relation to the Mining State Environmental Planning Policy Amendment currently on public exhibition.

My name is Sarah Ciesiolka. My family lives and farms on the rich soils between Wee Waa and Narrabri, less than 6km downstream from Santos' Proposed Stage 1 Narrabri Gas Project, the largest proposed gas field in NSW. We are groundwater irrigators who rely on access to our most precious resource, uncontaminated water, to irrigate our crops. We also rely on that same water for drinking and everyday household tasks. In short, we have no other reliable source of water. We farm potatoes, peanuts and grains that feed the people of NSW and Australia. To put that into some perspective, each year, year in, year out, our farm produces enough potatoes for 26 million roast dinners, enough peanuts for 2.4 million packets of beer nuts and 360,000 jars of peanut butter and enough wheat to make 3.3 million loaves of bread. The end point value of this product is in excess of \$50 million annually, and we also employ up to 20 permanent and seasonal staff.

The sole reason that I provide this information is to highlight that we are just one farm in the highly productive and highly valuable agricultural region immediately surrounding the Narrabri Gas Project area. If you were to extrapolate that out, you will gain some understanding of the value of vital agricultural production that is at risk from the establishment of the coal and coal seam gas industry in our region, a region where co-existence is nothing more than a myth perpetrated by the coal and gas industries. I cannot overstate the

importance to the state and the nation of our food producing areas, not just in terms of food security, but also in terms of employment and investment.

**I wish to add my wholehearted support to the proposal to remove clause 12AA of the SEPP and hope that this change occurs quickly after submissions close on 21 July 2015.**

It is unthinkable that any Government would risk “one off” extraction of fossil fuel resources (coal seam gas) whilst putting at risk a renewable long term resource (water) and public health, risking thousands of hectares across NSW vulnerable to a position that is unviable for life and agriculture. Once our groundwater resources, or our health, is contaminated or destroyed, there is no turning back, there is no “make good”. No amount of money will change the outcome.

There is wide-scale community rejection of the coal seam gas industry in North West NSW and the Government must listen to, and respect the will of, the community. Community run surveys, which span an area of close to 3 million hectares across our region to date, have shown an average of 96% support for remaining Gasfield Free. This clearly demonstrates the overwhelming community rejection of the coal seam gas industry here and, in particular, Santos’ planned Narrabri Gas Project (1). This is about so much more than money – it’s about protecting our farmland, our water resources and our communities for future generations of Australians.

In addition, I also strongly urge you to adopt further amendments to the SEPP as outlined below aimed at improving and restoring balance and fairness. You see, we are the families and communities that stand to be directly and negatively impacted when things go wrong.

1. Part9A of the SEPP needs to be amended so that it also makes open-cut coal mining prohibited development within the exclusion zones currently applied to coal seam gas.
2. Further exclusions should also be listed in this Part, and applied to coal, or Schedule 1 of the SEPP, including the Special Areas of Sydney’s drinking water catchment, the Broke-Fordwich wine region, productive farmland, productive aquifers and critically endangered woodlands.
3. This section should also be amended so that the buffer zone (section 5) applies to the critical industry clusters. The list of critical industry clusters needs to be expanded to include additional clusters identified through a systematic process, in addition to horse-breeding and wine-growing in the Hunter.

4. The 2km exclusion around urban areas and residential zones should be extended to also apply to all household dwellings - for both unconventional gas and coal mining.
5. For water resources, the prohibition must include alluvial aquifers and 2km around fourth order streams in an expanded Part 9A.
6. Part 12AB (Non-discretionary standards) constrains consent authorities from adopting more stringent environmental standards than the SEPP allows. This is utterly irresponsible and is leading to poor environmental and social outcomes. The action of this provision must be reversed so that development cannot occur if it breaches the standards, but consent authorities are free to adopt more stringent standards where appropriate.
7. Similarly, the “voluntary” land acquisition and mitigation policy is fundamentally unjust and must be repealed or dramatically altered.
8. The Major Projects Offset policy must be changed to restore the “like-for-like” principle on all offsets and limit the use of mine-site rehabilitation and complementary measures for offsetting.
9. Ensure the public can appeal poor decisions. The Minister and Planning and Assessment Commission must ensure that the next mining projects being considered, Drayton South, Narrabri Gas and Bylong Projects have full merits appeal rights retained – this simply requires ensuring there is a public hearing of the PAC.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely

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(1) <http://www.theland.com.au/news/agriculture/general/news/protest-sky-high-at-gunnedah/2726549.aspx>