SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO THE IMPACTS OF COAL SEAM GAS

We run a mixed farming & grazing operation over 2300 acres, 15km north of Coolah in NSW. We put forward our comments as landholders who have been affected by the existing Central Ranges high pressure gas pipeline and as farmers who are deeply concerned about the security of our valuable food production areas in Australia.

During a flood event in December 2010, some 8 metres of the Central Ranges high pressure gas pipeline was exposed on our black soil property. The black soil paddock where this flood damage occurred was inaccessible by road. The main road [Black Stump Way] which fronts our farm was closed with police assistance & the sandbagging process was carried out by helicopter. Repairs to the exposed pipeline & preventative measures to protect the pipeline did not commence until six [6] months after the damage occurred. These repairs were inconvenient & expensive. On completion of repair we have to contend with compaction of our black soil farmland after some 2800 T of rock & heavy machinery was utilised over the area for months. This compaction & loss of vegetation will take years to rehabilitate.

The APIA [Australian Pipeline Industry Association] made comment on 17th August 2011, denying the pipeline is to blame for the damage on our property. In an effort to discredit concerned farmers, the APIA spokesperson implies that we have questioned the veracity of the Soil Conservation Service's assessment of the pipeline erosion. We have not seen the Soil Conservation report nor have we been advised of its content. The article that I have seen also defends the pipeline industry's reputation for remediation & maintenance. We have no complaint with the professional standard of the rehabilitation work carried out by the Soil Conservation Service & the technical expertise displayed during the past six months and agree that the service is highly regarded. We have also stated that we have never had a problem with Jemena [the current pipeline managers] & their continued efforts to monitor & maintain the existing pipeline on our property.

However, we do believe that black soil is unstable & completely unsuitable for this type of infrastructure. We have evidenced this first hand & argue that our property should be used as an example of what can occur. We suffered a much greater flood event in November 2000, prior to the pipeline being laid in 2006. This gully did not react this way then & it was a more significant event.

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We are not scientists or engineers or PR dynamos nor do we have the resources to obtain these services. We base our sincere belief on 31 years of sustainable farming on Barana's black soil. Our experience has been that black soil does not re-stabilise once disturbed. The gully above & below the pipeline has seen erosion of some 1/3 less than the area directly around the pipeline. The black soil directly around the exposed pipeline had eroded a much larger area than the previous natural watercourse.

In the end, the cause of the pipeline exposure is irrelevant. The facts are;

- 8 metres of this high pressure gas pipeline, laid in black soil, has been exposed during a flood event.
- This pipeline could be anywhere across the black soil plains of NSW.
- This pipeline must be repaired in every instance and at great expense regardless of how it occurred.
- Our black soil is highly unstable and unsuitable for works of this nature.

The APIA article states "After the initial two weeks of disruption during the construction phase, land use can continue over the pipeline". The exposed pipeline in question was across a gully which we didn't farm, still is across a gully which we can't farm, so no land use will continue over the area especially now that it contains some 2400T of rock. This repair has taken 8 months not 2 weeks. The conclusion "that sedimentation of the watercourse well downstream of the pipeline forced the water flow to abandon the original channel for a less resistant path across local farmland" quoted by APIA in their defence does not address the exposure of the gas pipeline in an existing natural watercourse.

The damage to our property has been significant although not an isolated incident & we have experienced minor erosion & subsidence since 2006. There have been many others examples along the existing Central Ranges pipeline route that have suffered damage & ongoing repairs to the north & south of Coolah.

Eastern Star Gas/Santos continues its push for a pipeline through the Liverpool Plains to Coolah with complete disregard to anger & protest by the majority of affected farmers from Boggabri to Coolah? These landholders will shoulder the burden of permanent damage to the environmentally sensitive areas in their care

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Why is Eastern Star Gas/Santos continuing its push for the pipeline through the black soil floodplains of the Liverpool Plains when an alternative route exists? The Newell Highway route will not go through prime agricultural land can follow the railway easement & has all weather access for inspections, maintenance & repair. This alternative has not been displayed at any of the information sessions nor would it appear this option has even been considered.

We've had many politicians & representatives from government departments who have viewed the damage to the current natural gas pipeline on our property. They all agreed that the fragile, highly erosive black soil plains are unsuitable for the proposed, much larger, CSG pipeline. They gave assurances that they would support the proposal for the pipeline to follow the Newell Highway route. Barry O'Farrell has stated twice [pre-election & on air with Alan Jones] that this pipeline should go along the Newell Highway NOT on the productive agricultural land of the Liverpool Plains. In our fight to keep this insidious industry off our prime agricultural lands, landholders have been deserted by our local government representatives & lambasted at every opportunity by federal & state Labor ministers & the Australian Petroleum Production Exploration Association & more recently the APIA. The only comment spewed forth in the derision of farmers is that we have no rights in the face of the mining giants & short term monetary gain for governments.

We will never agree to another pipeline on our property. If we had been aware of the industry that was to follow & the damage that was possible we would not have agreed to the existing pipeline. We are not suffering from "not in my backyard" syndrome; we have a pipeline in our "backyard" and we have experienced first hand what can happen. We cannot & will not risk any further damage to our precious agricultural land from a much larger pipeline, or any more that are planned. We will fight so that we don't become another farmer being told that the gas companies are going to put multiple wells on our farmland reducing it to nothing more than a barren gas field. We are no longer naïve & see first hand what has happened to our farming friends in Queensland & around the world.

Farmers have a responsibility to protect the vital food production areas into the future and we should have the right to some control over the precious land in our care. There is an alternative for coal energy but there is NO alternative for food. The coal seam gas industry is a finite source of energy & methods of extraction are neither clean nor green.

Submission to the Inquiry into the Impacts of Coal Seam Gas

Gas companies claim that these projects advantage the local community. We know from our experience in Coolah that there is negligible benefit during pipeline construction and once the pipeline is completed there are no ongoing gains to local communities; our small community cannot access the natural gas which goes through our town. The benefits are enjoyed by shareholders & foreign interests. Why put our soil, water & future food supply at risk to export our natural gas overseas?

9 April 2014

As a postscript to this submission some 3 years later; the groundswell of public protest all around NSW is building with many shires now declared “Gasfield Free” & we feel vindicated in our earlier serious concerns about this industry. This industry is supported by government against the will of the people. We are not prepared to risk our property for this industry’s gain nor should any investor take the risk on an industry whose operations have unknown outcomes for our agricultural environment & one that is facing such opposition. This industry has proven harmful environmental incidents, is proven to be neither clean nor green & has a finite lifespan.

15 March 2016

Once again I find myself providing a submission for yet another inquiry. Six years on, the protests have increased & yet the people who fight to protect their livelihood, their environment and a future for our children are sadly being threatened with fines & imprisonment while the big miners have their fines reduced and legislation revised to suit them. Our governments are still not listening to the communities they claim to represent. This submission is also a day late but as a farming wife who also works in town while raising a family I am unable to compete with a mining lobby with money, staff & government at their disposal and politicians on their payroll once these politicians leave office.