

Submission - Narrabri Gas Project

26 April 2017

I write this submission re the Narrabri Gas Project to voice my concern about the destructive unconventional gas industry. I have visited the gasfields in Queensland and have seen and experienced first hand the destruction of farmland and the environmental impacts, not to mention the disregard for human life and livelihood.

I have also visited the Pilliga and I am extremely distressed that this biodiversity hotspot would even be considered as suitable for an industry that produces complete industrialisation of the landscape.

My points are listed below:

1. Risks to precious water sources, including the Great Australian Basin.

Creeks in the Pilliga run into the Namoi River—a part of the Murray Darling Basin. This system is vulnerable to contamination from drilling fluid spills and the salty treated water produced from the proposed 850 wells. The Narrabri gasfield poses a real risk to our two most precious water resources: the Great Artesian Basin and the Murray-Darling Basin. The area of the Great Artesian Basin with the highest recharge rates is almost entirely contained within the Pilliga East forest. In a worst-case scenario, the water removed for CSG extraction could reduce water pressure in the recharge areas—potentially stopping the free flow of waters to the surface at springs and bores across the whole Great Artesian Basin.

2. Farmers and local community reject the project

Extensive community surveys have shown an average of 96% opposition to CSG. This stretches across a massive 3.2 million hectares of country surrounding the Pilliga forest, including 99 communities. Hundreds of farmers have participated in protest actions unlike any previously seen in the region.

3. Traditional Custodians are opposed

There are hundreds of cultural sites as well as songlines and stories connecting the Gamilaraay to the forest and to the groundwater beneath. Gamilaraay people are deeply involved in the battle against CSG, and have told Santos they do not want their country sacrificed for a coal seam gas field.

4. The Narrabri Gas Project has a long history of spills and leaks of toxic CSG water.

Santos has already contaminated a freshwater aquifer in the Pilliga with uranium at levels 20 times higher than safe drinking water guidelines, as well as lead, aluminium, arsenic and barium². In addition, there have been over 20 reported spills and leaks of toxic CSG water from storage ponds, pipes and well heads. Santos cannot be trusted.

5. Human health is compromised by coal seam gas

The effects of volatile organic compounds released into the air from coal seam gas operations vary, but can cause eye, nose and airway irritation, headache, nausea, dizziness and loss of coordination. These impacts have been documented in human populations nearby to existing gasfields in Queensland, Sydney and in America.

6. The Pilliga is a haven for threatened wildlife

The Pilliga is one of 15 nationally listed 'biodiversity hotspots' and is vital to the survival of threatened species like the Koala, Spotted-tailed Quoll, Black-striped Wallaby, Eastern Pygmy-possum, Pilliga Mouse and South-eastern Long-eared Bat. The forest is home to over 200 bird species and is internationally recognised as an Important Bird Area². The Santos gasfield would fragment 95,000 hectares of the Pilliga with well pads, roads, and water and gas pipelines - damaging vital habitat and threatening the survival of endangered species.

7. Coal seam gas fuels climate change

Methane is by far the major component of natural gas, and is a greenhouse gas 72 times more powerful than CO². CSG fields contribute to climate change through the leakage of methane during the production, transport, processing and use of coal seam gas.

8. The nation's premier optical astronomical observatory is at risk

The Siding Springs Observatory, situated in the Warrumbungles and adjacent to the Pilliga, is under threat from the Narrabri Gas Project due to light and dust pollution. The area has been internationally recognised as a 'dark sky park', and the 50m high gas flares proposed by Santos threaten the viability of the facility.

9. Salt waste will result from the project

Santos has no solution for disposing of the between 17,000 and 42,000 tonnes of salt waste that would be produced each year. This industry would leave a toxic legacy in NSW.

10. Risk of fires throughout the Pilliga

The Pilliga is prone to severe bushfires. Methane flare stacks up to 50m high would be running day and night, even on total fire ban days. The project would increase ignition sources as well as extracting, transporting and storing a highly flammable gas right within this extremely fire-prone forest.

I look forward to hearing that this destructive project has NOT been given the green light to proceed.

Lynette Eggins