

URGENT

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Briefing on Operation Stapler – Northern Region.

BACKGROUND:

Metgasco Limited (Metgasco) is prepared to drill a conventional gas well site (Rosella E01) at Lot 1 DP 122850, 1480 Bentley Road, Bentley. The site is located approximately 14 kilometres west of Lismore within the Richmond Valley Local Government area. Metgasco have an access agreement with the land owners consistent with the relevant provisions of the *Petroleum (Onshore) Act 1991*.

Since December 2013 Richmond Local Area Command have been consulting stakeholders in respect of perceived adverse public order and protest activity aimed at disrupting drilling operations, which may also attract significant media interest. Control of Operation Stapler now rests with the Northern Region Commander.

The sophistication of strategies being employed by the (loose) coalition of issue motivated groups present have not previously been observed by police. Some of the strategies used by the protestors include telegraph poles across the driveway entrance, a concrete bunker where protestors lock-on to an anchor device and mass lock-on devices.

The location of the drilling site and protestor behaviour presents an unprecedented public order challenge. This will require police to protect a 'greenfield' for Metgasco to build the protective and operational infrastructure on a 24 hour basis for extended period of time. There are no barriers or structures to assist in the tactical resolution of this matter.

From the outset Metgasco acknowledge that they have never previously dealt with protest activity to this extent. The company has been collaborative in their planning and take advice on the tactical issues.

The camp became 'illegal' as of midnight 25 April, 2014 as the authority under S68 of the *Local Government Act* expired and a subsequent DA has been refused. Richmond Valley Shire Council are awaiting the submission of an update DA in respect of the camp.

COMMENT:

Metgasco operations were originally scheduled to commence on Monday 31 March, 2014, however was postponed due to inclement weather. Drilling is now anticipated to start in the week commencing 19 May 2014. At this stage a police presence will be required from 18/5/14 – 7/6/14 (this timeframe has been estimated in consultation with Metgasco).

Risk to public and police safety (particularly during movements of the 79 heavy vehicles in completion of the installation) is high to extreme. There are many risks identified at that level including the risk of litigation being identified as 'catastrophic'.

The community ground swell of support is strong and becoming stronger every day. This extends to open support for protestors through the Local Government mayors of the neighbouring LGAs (Lismore, Tweed and Kyogle). The camp presently has approximately 1000 permanent residents, with 100 – 200 visitors per day. This camp site is less than 500 metres from the proposed drilling site. The campsite is on private property. The landowner is fully supportive of the process and is refusing to comply with directions from Richmond Valley Shire Council.

GIPA s 14 Table 4(d)


GIPA s 14 Table 1(f)

A list of dot points, suitable for forwarding to the Department of Premier and Cabinet, are attached at Annexure A.

Further information on strategies employed by the protestors, the timetable for operations and police costs are attached as Annexures B, C and D.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Minister note the above information.


Jeff Loy APM
Assistant Commissioner
Northern Region
5 May 2014

Annexure A – Points for Department of Premier and Cabinet

- Metgasco Limited (Metgasco) is prepared to drill a conventional gas well site (Rosella E01) at Lot 1 DP 122850, 1480 Bentley Road, Bentley. The site is located approximately 14 kilometres west of Lismore within the Richmond Valley Local Government area
- Control of Operation Stapler, the police response to public order and protest activity at Bentley, now rests with the Northern Region Commander.
- A high level of sophistication has been shown by the protestors at the site. Some of the strategies used by the protestors include telegraph poles across the driveway entrance, a concrete bunker where protestors lock-on to an anchor device and mass lock-on devices.
- The camp became 'illegal' as of midnight 25 April, 2014 as the authority under S68 of the *Local Government Act* expired and a subsequent DA has been refused.
- Drilling by Metgasco is now anticipated to start in the week commencing 19 May 2014. At this stage a police presence will be required from 18/5/14 – 7/6/14 (this timeframe has been estimated in consultation with Metgasco).
- Risk to public and police safety (particularly during movements of the 79 heavy vehicles in completion of the installation) is high to extreme.
- The community ground swell of support is strong and becoming stronger every day. This extends to open support for protestors through the Local Government mayors of the neighbouring LGAs (Lismore, Tweed and Kyogle).
- The camp presently has approximately 1000 permanent residents, with 100 – 200 visitors per day. This camp site is less than 500 metres from the proposed drilling site. The campsite is on private property. The landowner is fully supportive of the process and is refusing to comply with directions from Richmond Valley Shire Council.

GIPA s14 Table 1(f)

Attachment B – Strategies used by protestors

Some of the strategies used by the protestors from the outset were telegraph poles across the driveway entrance locked into position with concrete and attached to the high standing pole structures; a concrete bunker continually occupied on a rotating shift some 1.8 meters underground where protestors lock-on to an anchor device; buried obstacles, road spikes and wire obstacles; mass lock on devices enabling up to 100 people to quickly lock on to object; an SMS warning system to activate immediate response from Lismore and other townships to any attempt by police to support the establishment of the drilling site; use of 'lockouts' on approach roads, monitoring activity around Lismore Police Station and obtaining information on catering orders for police resources; mass disobedience and disorder strategies associated with any arrest by police (this includes having no identification, refusing to supply details, refusing en-masse to obey lawful directions) all therefore stalling custody processes; the use of specially designed vehicles to lock on and bury into the work site access including the use of flammable liquids to prevent police attempts to cut metal securing devices; intimidation of local service providers that are anticipated as those likely to be used by police and the use of social media as an information source and propaganda tool against police and Metgasco.

More recent strategies have included the use of an aerial 'drone' equipped with CCTV capability, concise instructions across the social media platform describing the vehicles used by the company and how to report their movements around the area (predicating an attempt to begin work) referred to as the 'Rig Movement Warning System'.