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Agriculture, Resources and Environment Committee
Parliament House
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Sent by email: arec@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

Protection of Prime Agricultural Land and Other Land from Coal Seam Gas Mining Bill 2013

I refer to the *Protection of Prime Agricultural Land and Other Land from Coal Seam Gas Mining Bill 2013* (Bill) that was referred by Hon Ray Hopper MP Member for Condamine on 7 June 2013 to the Agriculture, Resources and Environment Committee (Committee) for consideration.

The Sunshine Coast Regional Council (Council) at its Ordinary Meeting of 19 September 2013 endorsed the preparation of a submission for the Bill. This submission has been prepared under delegated authority from the Council in consultation with the Council's officers.

Summary

The Council is generally supportive of the Bill and its proposal to put in place an exclusion area to help provide for the sustainability of the agricultural industry and food security. Council is concerned about the lack of certainty around the risks to Queensland's agricultural land associated with CSG proposals and the extent to which those risks can be mitigated.

However, the Council wishes to raise with the Committee its concerns that the exclusion area will not apply to the whole of the Sunshine Coast. Council sees it as prudent for the entire Sunshine Coast to be included until the potential impacts of CSG activities on the productive capacity and sustainability of agricultural lands are more fully understood.

This submission outlines a number of issues arising from the Bill together with suggestions on how the Bill could be amended to address these concerns.

Submission

Need for more definitive information and cautious approach

The economic benefits of CSG to the whole of the State are well recognised and the Sunshine Coast has a role to play in this. The Sunshine Coast provides support to the CSG

industry in terms of employment (eg. administration) and housing through fly-in-fly out arrangements connected to other parts of the state where CSG activities are an established part of the regional economy.

Because of limited definitive science relating to CSG impacts and concerns amongst the broader community, Council sees it as reasonable that CSG activities be viewed cautiously and decisions based on well considered science. In the interests of protecting agricultural land and underground water resources, it is prudent that CSG exploration and mining activities be further regulated over certain areas ahead of information on the potential impacts on the productive capacity of agricultural land and its long term viability for food and fibre production.

Exclusion areas should apply to the whole of the Sunshine Coast

Until a complete assessment can be made at the strategic level as to how best to resolve the coexistence of and conflicts between agricultural land (and other rural values) and resource extraction, Council sees it as appropriate that a moratorium be put in place on CSG exploration and mining and that this apply across the whole of the Sunshine Coast.

There are a number of reasons for including the entire Sunshine Coast region in the exclusion area—

- 1) The whole of the Sunshine Coast is recognised and promoted as a leading food production and processing area.
- 2) Protecting agricultural land across the region from incompatible uses, fragmentation and alienation is important in achieving local food security aspirations, in taking advantage of growing external markets, and for growing the regional economy.
- 3) Agricultural production and rural lands on the Sunshine Coast are of significant landscape value and contribute to the region's character, lifestyle, scenic amenity, tourism and regional economy.
- 4) The protection of agricultural land and rural landscapes protects air and water quality, as well as maintains visual connectivity and urban breaks that define the unique character of the Sunshine Coast.
- 5) The draft Sunshine Coast planning scheme protects agricultural land and recognises that some natural resources may not be suitable for exploitation due to their location and their potential to create land use conflicts including on agricultural lands. The extent to which land use conflicts and potential permanent impacts from CSG activity can be mitigated on the Sunshine Coast is not well understood.
- 6) Council's Rural Futures Strategy seeks to strengthen and enhance the existing role of the hinterland as a location for agricultural production, as a lifestyle area, as a tourism destination and for a range of related economic opportunities compatible with rural values and characteristics (eg. value adding rural industries, biofuel feedstock).

- 7) Efforts on the Sunshine Coast to enhance the available productive and potentially productive land for future agricultural activities will go towards the target of doubling agricultural production in Queensland by 2040 set out in 'Queensland's Agricultural Strategy'.
- 8) The whole of the Sunshine Coast within the broader SEQ region should be seen as a special case as it takes in areas of closer settlement, population growth and agricultural land that need to be safe guarded.
- 9) The Sunshine Coast has special contextual qualities and unique opportunities of value to Queensland as a whole in terms of tourism, natural beauty and ecosystem services.

No identifiable rationale for the extent of the exclusion area

The exclusion area set out in the Bill bisects the Sunshine Coast—applying generally to the area south of Landsborough—with no identifiable rationale. The characteristics, qualities and opportunities set out above continue north beyond the Chinchilla Line. Hence, extending the exclusion area to take in all of the Sunshine Coast would more comprehensive, consistent and equitable and provide greater certainty for rural landholders and business investors on the Sunshine Coast. It would provide for the necessary protection of agricultural and other non-urban lands from potential impacts arising from CSG exploration and mining until further information is available on the potential consequences and likelihood of any impacts.

Should the bill proceed, a clear rationale should be established as to extent of the exclusion area so that the exclusion areas is logical, defensible and has a firm planning basis.

No definition for prime agricultural land

The Bill does not define the term 'prime agricultural land' but makes reference to Strategic Cropping Land under the Strategic Cropping Act. This is confusing given that Bill applies to the whole of the exclusion area and not just Strategic Cropping Land.

Good quality agricultural land and Strategic Cropping Land is mapped and protected under the draft Sunshine Coast Planning Scheme, but not prime agricultural land. There appears to be no mention of prime agricultural land in any recent state planning documents.

Given that the exclusion area takes a blanket approach, Council does not see it necessary to identify specific agricultural lands for the purposes of regulating CSG activities.

Sunshine Coast Council has clear policy on protecting agricultural land

Council's draft planning scheme, existing planning schemes and Rural Futures Strategy set clear objectives around maintaining and enhancing productive agricultural land, increasing the range of businesses in the food production and processing sector, and promoting the region as a leading food production and processing area. Ensuring that only compatible rural land uses are allowed to coexist on productive agricultural land is essential to this. Further research and information relevant to South East Queensland is required to assist with understanding whether potential impacts from CSG activities on agricultural land and landscape values can be appropriately and reliably mitigated.

If you require further information or clarification of this submission, please contact Warren Bunker, Executive Director Regional Strategy and Planning on (07) 5441 8182.

Yours faithfully



JOHN KNAGGS
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER