



# Condamine Catchment Management Assoc

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Our Condamine Catchment Community with the capacity to achieve a Sustainable Future

## **Comments on the Protection of Prime Agricultural Land and Other Land from Coal Seam Gas Mining Bill 2013**

18 October 2013

Submission to:

The Chair

Agriculture, Resources and Environment Committee

Parliament House

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These comments are presented by the Vice President of Condamine Catchment Management Association, Dr John Standley, on behalf of the Condamine Catchment Management Association (CCMA). CCMA is a community driven catchment management group that has members within the Condamine region. The group aims to work with landholders, community groups, industry groups and all spheres of government within a river catchment on a regional scale.

## **“CCMA’s Comments on the Protection of Prime Agricultural Land and Other Land from Coal Seam Gas Mining Bill 2013”**

### **Introduction**

The CCMA wholeheartedly supports this Bill, which is a logical progression from the recognition by the LNP before the March 2012 election that agriculture is one of the four key pillars of the Queensland economy. Moreover, the purpose of ‘statutory regional planning’ was to provide priority agricultural areas absolute protection from mining. The ‘protected’ land in clause 8 of the Bill includes key areas of highly productive agricultural land, a function of fertile soils, rainfall and availability of high quality aquifers of water suitable for irrigation, stock and domestic use.

The areas covered include the renowned Darling Downs around the Cecil Plains, Pittsworth, Warwick, Killarney region plus the Stanthorpe, Lockyer Valley and Inglewood regions. These, and their associated communities, are vital for the future of Queensland. Long term job security with security of tenure has been the key to the successful development of agriculture across the region.

At the World Congress of Soil Science held at the Brisbane Convention Centre in 2010 the urgent need to protect agricultural areas was highlighted by Julian Cribb - see Julian Cribb (2010) *The coming famine – the global food crisis and what we can do to avoid it* from CSIRO Publishing. Moreover, the urgent need to preserve fresh water supplies and reserves of high quality underground water reserves, for drinking and irrigation purposes in particular, was emphasised by Colin Chartres at the Congress. Refer to the book by Colin Chartres and Samyuktha Varma (2011) *Out of Water – From abundance to scarcity and how to solve the world’s water problems* published by Financial Times Press, Upper Saddle, New Jersey 07458. Both books should be essential reading for Queensland planners and the State should take the lead in showing the world how it is looking after both its finite agricultural and water resources.

### **Comments on the Bill**

1. Presently agriculture, farming communities, and those from generations of farmers who have developed the land and often lead the way with both investment and use of modern technology in their enterprises, have no security. Preference is being given to mining and coal seam gas enterprises, which have limited life, in preference to the long term need to save water resources and the most productive agricultural land. The Bill addresses this security question.

2. Clause 2 Purposes – these are supported by CCMA.
3. Clause 3 and Clause 8 and mapping
  - a) Earlier sources of information for mapping purposes should be used. One example is the series of four maps in the scientifically rigorous report “Assessment of the agricultural and pastoral potential of Queensland”, by EJ Weston, J Harbison, JK Leslie, KM Rosenthal and RJ Mayer. Agriculture Branch Technical Report No. 29, Queensland DPI, Brisbane (1981). This report includes maps of Queensland showing suitability for different agricultural purposes, albeit presented on the broad Australian Soils Atlas mapping units. There are 1455 units and each has been classified according to its cropping and pastoral potential. Land is classified as being well adapted or marginally adapted for permanent or rotational cropping (and for native pasture or sown pasture). This information is an invaluable resource which delineates the most productive, and therefore strategic, cropping and pastoral areas. It should be used as a ‘starting position’ for defining where mining and coal seam gas exploration leases should not be permitted.
  - b) Errol Weston and John Harbison have a number of other publications including Weston *et al.* –1975 AJAAS special edition - *Condamine Maranoa Basin Evaluation of Resources* and CSIRO did a Land Use survey circa 1975 of this area. Most if not all the work has been done – just forgotten – the Department did a lot of good enduring work in the old days – why has it been forgotten?
  - c) More recently a series of Land Management Manuals has been compiled by DPI. These should also be used to emphasise the locations of the most productive agricultural land, a combination of fertile soils, rainfall and availability of high quality water for irrigation.
  - d) The Bill encompasses a catchment scale approach so that not only is the cropping land retained but also the intake areas for aquifers and important areas of environmental biodiversity are rescued. The Bill, in the vital Clause 8(2), avoids the strategic cropping land approach which generates a “spotted dog” pattern – areas beyond the “spots” are vulnerable to mining. Only about 4% of Queensland falls into the strategic cropping category. The recently proposed PALU and PAA approach reduces even more drastically the prime agricultural areas, decimating even the SCL areas, with no permanent protection.
  - e) Presently there is no protection of the most productive agricultural land (“strategic cropping land”) from urban and infrastructure development, mining and coal seam gas projects. This land will be lost forever, as will the farmers, at a time when such land should become even more precious (see Introduction). In other words, sustainability has taken a back seat to social and commercial use.
  - f) Depletion of high quality aquifers is a real possibility in areas such as Cecil Plains where these aquifers may be connected to those drained when coal seam gas is extracted.

This may be a slow and continuous process for many, many years but the result will be loss of crops because of loss of water supplies, as well as the loss of domestic water supplies. It is an irreversible cycle for future generations. This threat exists across the Downs, stretching from Dalby to Toowoomba to Pittsworth, Warwick and Killarney. Moreover, to the best of our knowledge, no means of disposing of the salt content of CSG water exists – these salts pose a real contamination threat to both water supplies and soils. One only has to consider salinity problems in other parts of Australia.

4. Clause 4 Act binds all persons  
CCMA supports liability extending to the Commonwealth and other State governments.
5. Clause 7 – CCMA supports the definition of CSG activity.
6. Clauses 9 and 10 – supported by CCMA.
7. Clause 13(3) - important  
It should be shown, on the basis of previous research, that the land can be rehabilitated to its original activity after the activities have been terminated.

## **Perspective**

If there is doubt about the importance of agriculture, with its associated employment, to the future of Australia one only has to view the video on You Tube [http://m.youtube.com/watch?v=5GhsTIDg4I4&desktop\\_uri=%2Fwatch%3Fv%3D5GhsTIDg4I4](http://m.youtube.com/watch?v=5GhsTIDg4I4&desktop_uri=%2Fwatch%3Fv%3D5GhsTIDg4I4) . The areas of excluded land in Clause 8(2) are key contributors with a very well established record. A long term perspective for future generations, with a global perspective, is a far more responsible way to proceed than the present short term perspective.

(Text prepared by agricultural chemist Dr John Standley OAM, B.Sc.(Hons), Ph D, Postgraduate Diploma in Tropical Agronomy, Member of Soil Science Australia, on behalf of CCMA, October 2013).