



THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN OF QUEENSLAND INC.  
Established 1905

Patron: Her Excellency The Governor of Queensland  
Ms Penelope Wensley AC

Harris Terrace  
46 George Street  
BRISBANE QLD 4000  
8 July 2014

Research Director, Agriculture, Resources and Environment Committee  
AREC@parliament.qld.gov.au

Re: **Environmental and rural issues relating to the Mineral and Energy Resources (Common Provisions) Bill 2014**

Dear Sir,

The National Council of Women Queensland, NCWQ, which represents nearly 50 women's organisations, congratulates the Government in its endeavour to develop a single, common resources Act for the mining, petroleum and gas, greenhouse gas storage and geothermal energy sectors, so as to reduce red tape for the resources sector and to improve land access protection for the landholder.

However the NCWQ is concerned about:

- Lack of accountability and loss of safeguards through
  1. Loss of public notification for a predicted 90% of mines;
  2. Loss of the right to object to mining leases by the community;
  3. Possible lack of scrutiny of environmental issues by independent expert scientists;
- Acceleration of approvals before:
  1. Adequate data collection and hydrogeological research to make confident predictions with groundwater models;
  2. Impact of Coal Seam Gas and coal extraction on groundwater resources adequately understood;
  3. Social and health issues in rural communities adequately addressed.

Therefore, the NCWQ urges the State Government in its endeavour to streamline regulatory processes, to increase rather than decrease the safeguards for the environment and for rural communities.

Attached is supporting evidence for our recommendation by the NCWQ Environment and Rural and Remote Women Advisers. This submission has also been sent to The Hon. Jeff Seeney MP, Deputy Premier, Minister for State Development, Infrastructure and Planning; The Hon. Andrew Powell MP, Minister for Environment, and Heritage Protection; and The Hon. Andrew Cripps MP, Minister for Natural Resources and Mines

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Noela O'Donnell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Noela O'Donnell**  
**President NCWQ**

**Supporting Information from NCWQ Environment Officer, P.M. Pepper B.Sc. M.Sc. Ph.D., and NCWQ State Coordinator and Rural and Remote Women Adviser, B. Spencer.**

**The Mineral and Energy Resources (Common Provisions) Bill 2014:** The Queensland Government (QG) aims to slash red tape for the resources sector and to improve land access protection for the landholder by developing a single, common resources Act for the mining, petroleum and gas, greenhouse gas storage and geothermal energy sectors. The Mineral and Energy Resources Bill introduced to Parliament on 5 June 2014 begins this process and also aims to implement the Land Access Implementation Committee's recommendations that require legislative changes. These include expanding the Land Court's jurisdiction to hear conduct matters when considering conduct and compensation agreements; requiring that conduct and compensation agreements be noted on the relevant property title; and allowing two willing parties to opt out of entering a formal conduct and compensation agreement. <http://mines.industry.qld.gov.au/mining/modernising-qlld-resource-acts-program.htm>; [MinEnergyResCPB14E.pdf](#); <http://statements.qld.gov.au/Statement/2014/6/5/major-reforms-to-boost-resources-and-protect-landholders> However, the Environmental Defenders Office, EDO Qld, has raised serious concerns. Public notification and the community's right to object to the Queensland Land Court for in effect 90% of proposed mines (coal, bauxite, gold, uranium, etc) will be removed. Only the Local Council and landholders within the proposed mining lease area can object to the granting of a mining lease. This does not include neighbours. Only 'high risk' mines will be notified publicly for objection on environmental grounds (predicted to be only 10% of mines in Queensland). <http://www.edo.org.au/edoqld/news/the-proposed-removal-of-community-rights-to-object-to-mines/> This does not bode well, given the Independent Expert Scientific Committee (IESC) on Coal Seam Gas and Large Coal Mining Developments found 14 of 17 environmental assessments reviewed were deficient because they did not take proper account of the cumulative impacts the project would have on water, and 12 were also deficient in analysing how interference with ground and surface water would affect swamps, wetlands, ecological communities and threatened species. <http://www.environment.gov.au/coal-seam-gas-mining/interim-committee/project-advice.html> <https://theconversation.com/coal-and-gas-fail-the-test-when-it-comes-to-environmental-impact-13746> 26 April 2013

Other worrying aspects of the Mineral and Energy Resources Bill are the changes of definition of restricted land and the alterations to landholder's rights. The proposed legislation allows for restricted land to be included in the mining lease which is not the case at present. Restricted land no longer applies to principal stockyards, bores, artesian wells, dams and other artificial water storages connected to a water supply. (P34 [MinEnergyResCPB14E.pdf](#);) )

Also consent provisions currently in place for restricted land will be totally removed where the mine is open cut. <http://www.edo.org.au/edoqld/news/the-proposed-removal-of-community-rights-to-object-to-mines/> Property Rights Australia are concerned that this Bill and associated regulations will further erode the rights of landowners to conduct their businesses and protect their factors of production, their infrastructure, the amenity of their residences, future business planning decisions and future dwellings. <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Property-Rights-Australia/1447858205456687>

**Regional Planning Interests Act 2014** was passed on 20 March 2014 by the Queensland Parliament. It aims to guarantee protection of prime farm land and communities from encroaching resource development, especially coal seam gas and coal, and to resolve potential conflicts which may arise from the interaction between competing land uses, including agriculture and resources. In areas of regional interest (i.e. a priority agricultural area; a priority living area; the strategic cropping area; or a strategic environmental area) resource activities and other regulated activities will require a regional interests development approval. However, exemptions include certain activities agreed with the land owner, activity carried out for less than one year, and pre-existing resource activities. While farmer organisations welcome the Act as it helps redress the current power imbalance in land

access arrangements and gives some landholders an equal say in what actually will occur on their land <http://www.gasfieldscommissionqld.org.au/whats-happening/regional-planning-laws-passed.html>, the Environmental Defenders Office, EDO Qld, is concerned that since if a landholder agrees to the resource activity, the mining company will simply notify the Government and undertake the activity without any scrutiny. There will be no public notification of the regional interest activity (RIA) application; no opportunity to make public submissions on the RIA; no third party public interest appeal rights; and no assessment of how significant the impacts are on the regional interest area. <http://www.edo.org.au/edoqld/news/parliamentary-committee-recommends-regional-planning-interests-bill-2013-be-passed/>; *NCWQ Environment Report May 2014* At a State Development, Infrastructure and Industry Committee Hearing into this Bill, Mr Barry Lyon, Senior Conservation Ranger, Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve, Australia Zoo put the case that bauxite mining and land set aside for nature conservation purposes such as the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve were incompatible. With strip mining, large areas are cleared and bauxite, which is the supporting substrate for the ecosystem, is taken out and the landscape is lowered. When that substrate that supported the original ecosystem is gone, the hydrology is affected. Monsoonal rain that falls on the bauxite plateau filters through the bauxite into the deeper aquifer and feeds the springs, which then feed the Wenlock river *Public Hearing—Inquiry Into The Regional Planning Interests Bill 2013 Transcript Of Proceedings Wednesday, 12 February 2014 Brisbane; NCWQ Environment Report February 2014* The Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve and Wenlock River have been declared a Strategic Environment Area so are restricted to environmental uses. <http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/queensland/government-rejects-cape-york-bauxite-mine-20140312-34msa.html> But any new mining or gas development can go ahead on other areas of the bauxite plateau or on other sensitive areas elsewhere with the agreement of landholders.

**Impacts of coal seam gas extraction on groundwater resources:** As Dr Catherine Moore, Senior Research Scientist CSIRO Land and Water, notes questions remain about how the removal of groundwater during coal seam gas extraction will affect regional groundwater, quality and quantity over short and long time scales; and what effect may re-injection of treated coal seam gas water have on existing groundwater quality? [http://www.gisera.org.au/research/transcript\\_water.html](http://www.gisera.org.au/research/transcript_water.html) Scientists at Gas Industry Social & Environmental Research Alliance, GISERA, are conducting baseline groundwater quality measurements; water transport modelling (reservoir to regional scale) to predict cumulative impacts of re-injection on groundwater and modelling short and long term changes to groundwater quality in Surat and Bowen Basins. [www.gisera.org.au/snapshot-gisera-research.pdf](http://www.gisera.org.au/snapshot-gisera-research.pdf) As Dr Matthew Currell, Lecturer in Hydrogeology, School of Environmental Engineering at RMIT University, advises a long period of data collection and hydrogeological investigation is needed to make confident predictions with groundwater models. The models are characterised by uncertainty. For example, how much or how quickly one aquifer may register changes in water pressures in response to de-watering somewhere else can't be determined exactly. Rather, a range of possible outcomes, with a certain level of confidence could realistically be provided. Similarly, how quickly pollution will move through an aquifer, and whether or when it might ultimately reach a wetland or stream is difficult to predict exactly. Many proposed mines will affect groundwater, in many cases from aquifers already used by people and important ecosystems. <http://theconversation.com/coal-and-gas-projects-cant-be-rushed-heres-why-18739> 9 October 2013 The importance of having the water trigger legislation and assessments by the IESC is shown by their track record. <http://www.environment.gov.au/coal-seam-gas-mining/interim-committee/project-advice.html> <https://theconversation.com/coal-and-gas-fail-the-test-when-it-comes-to-environmental-impact-13746> 26 April 2013 Given that water resources are such an essential resource to the economy and the environment would it not be prudent to slow the pace of CSG development until the science is done and to keep safeguards in place?

**Health and Social Issues:** Following concerns raised by Tara residents about the impact of increased CSG activity on their health, the Queensland Health Department undertook a risk assessment based on clinical and environmental monitoring data available but found no clear link between emissions from CSG activities and health complaints from residents.

However the report, published in 2013, acknowledged the social impact of CSG activities on the community, stated that the impact of noise and vibration required further investigation and recommended a more strategic ambient air monitoring program to identify current and future impacts of CSG activities on air quality. [http://www.health.qld.gov.au/publications/csg/Coal seam gas in the Tara region: summary risk assessment of health complaints and environmental monitoring data report](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/publications/csg/Coal%20seam%20gas%20in%20the%20Tara%20region%3A%20summary%20risk%20assessment%20of%20health%20complaints%20and%20environmental%20monitoring%20data%20report) This report did not allay the fears of the community. At a meeting in 2013, a coalition of organisations including the Public Health Association of Australia, the Climate and Health Alliance, the National Rural Health Alliance, the Climate Change Health Research Network and the Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association noted that the risks to human health from energy and resources policy were not being well accounted for in current policy decisions and called for a precautionary approach to policy, and for potential intergenerational consequences to be considered.

Members of the Public Health and Child & Youth Health Committee agreed that there was a critical need for health implications to be a key part of the CSG approval processes. <https://ama.com.au/ausmed/node/4708>

A recent GISERA study explored farmers' perceptions of issues arising from large scale land use change due to the expansion of the CSG industry. Impacts on ground and surface waters are a primary concern. Issues regarding atmospheric pollution (dust, light, noise) and increased traffic have a significant impact on many aspects of farmers' lives. Culture differences between farmers and CSG staff has led to severe impacts on mental health and well being. *Huth N.I., Cocks B., Dalgliesh N., Poulton, P., Marinoni O., Navarro J. (2014) Farmers' perceptions of coexistence between agriculture and a large scale coal seam gas development: working paper, June 2014, CSIRO, Australia.* [http://www.gisera.org.au/publications/tech\\_reports\\_papers/ag-proj-2-farmer-perception-workingpaper.pdf](http://www.gisera.org.au/publications/tech_reports_papers/ag-proj-2-farmer-perception-workingpaper.pdf)

Thus it would appear further on-going research in the impact of CSG on communities is needed. Mental health does not appear to have been fully addressed and the on-going stress of not knowing the impacts of chemicals on health and disruption to rural community life can challenge many communities.