

Understanding and Applying the Concept of Socially Acceptable Coexistence: a submission to the inquiry into the Gasfield Commission Bill 2012
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Evidence by Ian Whan (President, Friends of Felton)

1. According to the Draft Bill, the Commission is being established to 'manage and improve sustainable coexistence' among landholders and regional communities (on one side) and the onshore gas industry (on the other side). From what we hear, the Commission will improve coexistence by facilitating information exchange between stakeholders. But reliance on 'information exchange' is unlikely to optimise coexistence outcomes and is scant justification for establishing a stand-alone statutory authority. Unless the Commission has the power to assess where, and where not, CSG mining can enter and establish within Queensland, the genuine concerns of landholders and rural communities and society as a whole, will be largely neglected.
2. Sustainable coexistence in every situation (but especially at one time in one place) is not proven by the historical presence of both mining and agriculture somewhere within the state of Queensland. Nor is support for CSG by some landholders evidence that coexistence is universally possible or acceptable. The consequences of recent encroachment by CSG miners onto prime farmland and close to residential concentrations has become an issue of great public concern and is the issue upon which establishment of the Commission should be focused. To this end, coexistence should be 'managed and improved' by the Commission to make the associated outcomes socially acceptable. Indeed the purpose of the Commission would be easier to understand, apply and achieve if the term 'sustainable coexistence' (adopted by the Draft Bill) was replaced by *socially acceptable coexistence*.
3. The scope for coexistence or otherwise should be determined on a case-by-case basis; the outcome will then depend on how the impacts of CSG mining are predicted to interact with the particular property, rural economy, the associated natural environment and the affected community. To deliver optimal coexistence throughout the State, the Commission should use its independence, expertise and experience to quantify CSG externalities in terms of their implications for social acceptability.
4. Generally speaking, the externalities resulting from CSG mining are large and include: soil, water and air pollution (due to inadvertent production of toxic water and vagrant gases), physical disruption (proportional to the intensity of precedent activities within the immediate area) and possible diminution of groundwater supplies (due to creation of pressure differentials and drawdown). It is the precise interaction between these externalities and local agriculture, the natural environment and/or the community (including human health) that will decide the acceptability issue and whether or not the particular CSG mining project should be permitted.
5. Achieving coexistence is particularly difficult where mining and intensive agriculture compete for access to the same land. Without intervention, the entry of mining into farming country results in less farm output and lower amenity values. At some critical point, these consequences are not socially acceptable. The Commission, with its unique riches of knowledge and experience, should be responsible for discovering these critical points and making appropriate stop/go recommendations.

6. If the Government wishes to bring about meaningful coexistence between landholders and communities (on one side) and the CSG industry (on the other side) it must define coexistence in terms of acceptable versus unacceptable externality levels, relative to the particular project and location under examination. An example might help to clarify this point.... It is understood that the Government is currently working with the Biological Farmers Association to ensure that organic food producers can operate throughout the State without suffering CSG externalities that would threaten their certification. Surely this requires the Commission to have the power to recommend against project proposals that would threaten the integrity of organic food production?
7. For the purpose of achieving coexistence, *social acceptability* can be defined as a decision making framework that encapsulates the best long term interests of all stakeholders. To operate in a socially acceptable manner, the CSG industry must, therefore, satisfy pre-determined political, economic, environmental and technical standards across the full expanse of Queensland and for current and future generations. It will only do this if there is market intervention that effectively modifies the industry's behaviour. Provided it is vested with the power and responsibility to recommend against particular CSG projects going ahead, the Commission will serve as the agent of socially acceptable market intervention.
8. To help individual commissioners meet acceptable standards of propriety and independence, the legislation should require them to publically declare any pecuniary interests they have – as our politicians are required to do. Also the legislation under which the Commission operates should spell-out the terms and conditions that individual commissioners are likely to enjoy while they hold office and subsequently.