



Submission to the Gasfields Commission Bill 2012

*To-Research Director, State Development,
Infrastructure and Industry Committee*

24th of January, 2013



Cotton Australia

Cotton Australia is the key representative body for the Australian cotton growing industry. It helps the industry to work together to be world competitive and sustainable, and also tell the good news about the industry's achievements. Cotton Australia determines and drives the industry's strategic direction, retaining its strong focus on Research and Development (R&D), promoting the value of the industry, reporting on its environmental credibility, and implementing policy objectives in consultation with its stakeholders.

Cotton Australia works to ensure an environment conducive to efficient and sustainable cotton production. It has a key role in Best Management Practices (*MyBMP*), an environmental management program for growers. This work has seen a significant improvement in the environmental performance of the industry, with huge improvements in water use efficiency, significant reductions in pesticide use, and millions of dollars invested into R&D.

The Australian cotton industry directly employs thousands of Australians and this year will contribute over \$2 billion to the Australia economy.

Cotton Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission on *Gasfields Commission Bill 2012*.

For further information or discussion on the content of this submission please contact Cotton Australia's Coal Seam Gas and Mining Policy Officer- Mr. Sahil Prasad on 0406 598 054 or sahilp@cotton.org.au .



General Comments:

Cotton Australia welcomes efforts by the Department of State Development Infrastructure and Planning (QLD) to establish the Gasfield Commission. Cotton Australia (we) are largely satisfied with the content of the *Gasfields Commission Bill 2012*, we remain concerned regarding the proposed powers and functions of the proposed Gasfield Commission. Please see below our concerns and recommendations below.

Part 3 Section 24

Cotton Australia accepts the need for transparency and access to relevant material to perform the stipulated functions noted in section's 6 and 7 of the Bill. We do note however, that there are potential practical implications under s.24 (3) (e) of the Bill.¹ We note a sentiment amongst our constituency that several key resource companies operating in Queensland remain reluctant to freely provide simple information e.g. location maps of wells, scientific test data etc. on the basis of confidentiality.

We are concerned that 'relevant material' under the Bill be frequently characterized as confidential by resource companies and as such impede the ability of the Commission to perform its functions. We suggest more restrictive criteria that would compel resource companies to provide or grant access to documents required by the commission would be more effective.

Part 3 Section 25

Whilst the abovementioned issue is of concern to Cotton Australia, it should be noted here that restricting the ability to deny access to relevant documents on the grounds of confidentiality to enable further disclosure and increased transparency for the Commission to perform its functions (e.g. facilitating better relationships between landholders, regional communities and the onshore

¹ Under s.24 (3)(e) of the Bill. "*the relevant material is confidential to the entity or the giving of the relevant material might be to the detriment of the entity's commercial or other interest*"



gas industry²) should not necessarily imply a right a to publish such provided information. We see that much of the information that is used to enable the functions of the Commission not become available to the general public unless it is of an anonymous and educational nature.

We are deeply concerned over the inability of a prescribed entity to object to the publishing of information that is beyond being deemed confidential. ³ Whilst confidential information is defined in relation to economic terms, several cotton growers hold information deemed ‘sensitive’ which may still cause distress if published. For example, publishing personal information may distress individuals who wish to remain anonymous, individual farming methods farming method or the number of farms held by an individual may be intended to be kept private, the existence of noxious weeds or general information may be wish to remain private on the grounds of retaining a certain professional image or standing. These are some examples of sensitive information not presently captured by the Bill.

Cotton Australia would recommend consent be obtained by the prescribed entity before publishing any information with the exception of:

- Information that is publicly available; or
- Statistical or other information that could not reasonably be expected to result in the identification of the individual to whom it relates

Submission End.

² *Gasfields Commission Bill 2012 (QLD) Pt. 1 s.6.*

³ Please see *Gasfields Commission Bill 2012 (QLD) Pt. 3 s.25(2)*