




Speech By  
**Shane Knuth**

**MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE**

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### **GASFIELDS COMMISSION BILL**

 **Mr KNUTH** (Dalrymple—KAP) (5.37 pm): The Gasfields Commission Bill 2012 prescribes the commission's membership, objectives, functions, powers and obligations when resolving issues that arise between landowners, the agricultural industry, environmental interests and the gas industry. A commission to address issues with water and land contamination and social infrastructure impacts surrounding the mining of gas should have been established from the outset and it is a failure of the previous government that this commission was not set up prior to the development of the coal seam gas industry. The former government's failure to establish a commission to oversee the development of coal seam gas is not an excuse for this government to avoid making a hard decision to protect fertile agricultural land and vital cattle properties that are threatened by this industry by imposing a moratorium. However, a lot of the controversy could be laid to rest if the state government imposed a 12-month moratorium on this industry to enable the commission to conduct an inquiry into the environmental and social impact of the industry and to develop a considered, well-researched and world's best practice approach for the future development of the industry.

Coal seam gas has proven to be a highly contentious issue in Queensland, in other states and overseas. There has been a lot of contradictory and emotional arguments both for and against its continuation in Queensland. At the moment the industry is waging an expensive media campaign to silence its opposition. However, until science rules out contamination of the Great Artesian Basin by chemical use and coal seam gas extraction, then proceeding with the development of the industry is irresponsible and reckless. An industry with the potential to destroy our environment and decimate our agricultural industry in such a devastating, permanent way must have appropriate regulations and extensive research into how and where development should occur.

The purpose of the commission as it is prescribed in this bill demonstrates an assumption that the gas industry and the agricultural communities are always able to find a way to co-exist but, as it was pointed out in a submission by Property Rights Australia to the committee on this bill, co-existence is not always possible. Without balance in the commission's purpose, the assumption that co-existence is possible in all circumstances immediately puts landowners in a compromised and vulnerable position where they know that, no matter what, eventually they will be forced to allow coal seam gas wells on their properties. Property Rights Australia provides an example of that balance by extending the scope of the commission's purpose to include facilitating the management of long-term sustainability and the protection of soil and water. The issue is balancing the demands of the gas industry with adequate protection for the agricultural industry and returning the rights of landowners to refuse development on their property.

It is not too stimulating for a business owner to endure the interruptions and loss of production resulting from trucks and mining equipment being driven over the land they depend on for their livelihood day in, day out. Landowners, whose families have owned properties for generations, have had to deal with the resources boom with little or no protection from government and they have watched their property rights gradually erode over the decades. They have watched their livelihoods and their idyllic way of life shattered by an exploration permit that gives multinational companies the

right to dig wells, build roads and mine infrastructure with minimal compensation. Most regulations seem to favour the mining companies, with the farmers not given the same rights to refuse development as are animal species that are classified as endangered, with a focus on development of the resource sector rather than the preservation of the agricultural sector. Although I support the intent of this bill, this fundamental imbalance has not been addressed.

Another example of the inherent inequality in the consideration of mining interests versus agricultural interests is highlighted in Cotton Australia's submission on the confidentiality provisions in the bill. Clause 24(3)(e) gives resource companies a loophole to restrict the commission's access to information that the entity may deem detrimental to the entity's commercial or other interests.

As I was saying, I fully believe that a 12-month moratorium should have been in place right from the beginning—not when this government came to power but two years before this industry was put in place. As I was saying, it is not stimulating to have all of these vehicles driving day in, day out, building roads, tracks and seeing the quality of life of these farmers ruined. This government has talked about promoting the \$14 billion agricultural industry, which is important to this state. I believe that it was the agricultural industry that got us out of the global economic crisis. But when you see millions and millions of megalitres pumped day in, day out of our underground watertables obviously there is going to be some impact on the irrigation aquifers in those regions. I am very concerned about co-existence.