




Speech By
Steve Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

GASFIELDS COMMISSION BILL

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (5.58 pm): I rise to support the Gasfields Commission Bill 2012 and the approved amendments recommended by the State Development, Infrastructure and Industry Committee in its Report No. 20. Our government made firm commitments to address the concerns of interest groups and communities. After many years of neglect under the previous government, we needed to address the issue of co-existence between the agricultural and resources sectors. Many times during this debate we have heard about the issues associated with co-existence. It is critical that we have strong leadership and legislation to assist all stakeholders in developing an industry that is critical to the economic development of our state. In negotiations, the GasFields Commission was able to achieve a 90 per cent consensus from industry and irrigator groups.

This legislation allows the establishment of the GasFields Commission as an independent statutory authority and will allow the commission to perform its duties for the benefit of all Queenslanders. In supporting the government's policy on being open and accountable, the commission has engaged with local businesses and regional chambers of commerce within or adjacent to coal seam gas development areas, inviting feedback on any issues associated with the industry. The GasFields Commission requires the powers and functions necessary to achieve its goal of managing and improving the issue of co-existence.

The key issue for the GasFields Commission is ensuring transparency and accountability in its advice and recommendations. Stakeholders need to be assured that the commission is acting in the best interests of all parties and is providing unbiased advice and recommendations to the Queensland government. The GasFields Commission's powers include the ability to work with relevant government agencies, landholders, gas companies and contractors to provide information. We all need the GasFields Commission to have the evidence it needs to properly understand the issues affecting communities and industry and to make informed recommendations about how co-existence can be improved. The bill provides powers for the GasFields Commission to compel information from landholders, gas companies and sub-contractors for gas companies relating to the commission's purpose and functions. If the landholders, gas companies or sub-contractors do not comply, they face substantial fines. Those powers are required to make sure the GasFields Commission can do its job of managing and improving co-existence and providing recommendations and advice to the government.

An important initiative in the legislation requires Queensland government agencies to consult with the GasFields Commission on the development of future legislation or policies. This means that the commission will be able to provide a balanced point of view on the impact of legislation or policies on all stakeholders as the commission, through its interaction with regional communities, has gained an invaluable understanding of their concerns. This important industry for Queensland has not been without issues, which is why I am happy to support this bill as it provides that the functions outlined in the bill are also about the GasFields Commission providing an independent, balanced point of view. Common issues raised with me about water and land contamination relating to the industry are addressed through the fulfilment of our election commitment to establish the GasFields Commission.

A key function of the commission is to provide advice on the ability of landholders, regional communities and the onshore gas industry to co-exist in identified areas. The commission will be able to facilitate communication with landholders, members of communities and the gas industry to resolve issues around the industry. It will be able to collaborate with organisations to undertake research where an identified need exists, making the commission an exemplary conduit for providing unbiased information to regional communities, landholders and the gas industry.

The important creation of community leaders councils will provide more information on concerns or emerging issues to the commission. This demonstrates our commitment to getting the best outcomes for two important pillars of our economy: agriculture and mining. The purpose of the GasFields Commission is to manage and improve sustainable co-existence between landholders, regional communities and the onshore gas industry. This is because sustainable co-existence means different things to different communities. There cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach and we need to manage the issues between agriculture and mining. What sustainable co-existence looks like will vary significantly depending on the location, the project's proximity to regional communities and potential impacts on the infrastructure and services of those communities. For this reason, the broad definition of 'sustainable co-existence' can be read as an intention to keep both industries progressing forward in such a way that they can operate effectively at the same time.

The GasFields Commission was formed in June last year, fulfilling an election commitment by the LNP to balance the CSG industry's development with the interests of landholders, communities and the environment. This industry is very important and generates a lot of interest and investment. Examples of the importance of the CSG industry include the fact that there were 82 nominations to fill the six commissioners' roles, 55 submissions on the commission's proposed powers and 17 submissions from the public on the bill now being debated in the House tonight.

It is clear that the commission has already proven effective. It is already facilitating negotiations between gas companies and landowners, has had input into government policy on coal seam gas water management and land access arrangements, has collated scientific research into groundwater impacts and has held lengthy public consultation processes across Queensland. In fact, the Commissioner, John Cotter, has attended almost 300 meetings and travelled almost 17,000 kilometres on commission business in less than one year.

Mrs France interjected.

Mr BENNETT: Absolutely; I take the interjection. This important industry has a real and tangible effect on my electorate with opportunities and employment. I remind the House that we do need to share the opportunities with the regions that generate the wealth. I take this opportunity to mention the Royalties for the Regions initiative as it relates to the Gladstone Regional Council and its important work with flood mitigation on the Fingerboard and Essendean roads. Those major roads provide the only access for many employees supporting the CSG industry. I congratulate the Deputy Premier, the parliamentary committee and Commissioner John Cotter. I commend the bill to the House.