

Question on Notice
No. 318
Asked on 29 March 2023

Mr J Lister asked Premier and Minister for the Olympic and Paralympic Games (Hon. A Palaszczuk)—

QUESTION:

With reference to coal seam gas (CSG) extraction in Queensland, including its groundwater take, handling of extracted water, and its social, environmental and economic impacts—

Will the Premier advise how the government ensures that (a) CSG extraction does not threaten rural communities' reliability of unpolluted groundwater water supply, (b) CSG extraction in the vicinity of the Condamine Alluvium will not result in damage to the productive potential of its associated primary production lands and (c) in respect of the Surat Gas Expansion Project (EPBC2010/5344), the CSG extraction approval holder does not exceed the groundwater drawdown or groundwater limits for each aquifer as specified in Queensland's Stage 1 CSG Water Monitoring Management Plans?

ANSWER:

I am advised by my department as follows.

Under the *Environmental Protection Act 1994*, the Department of Environment and Science (DES) manages and monitors environmental risk through a range of assessment and compliance activities. All resource operations, including petroleum and gas activities, require an environmental authority that sets out the expectations and conditions for environmental performance including in relation to impacts to groundwater environmental values.

DES also administers Chapter 3 of the *Water Act 2000*, which provides for the management of impacts to underground water as a result of petroleum and gas operators' take of underground water during the operation of their activity. The main tool used to identify and manage impacts as a result of taking underground water is the Underground Water Impact Report. In the Surat and southern Bowen Basins, the Office of Groundwater Impact Assessment prepares a single Underground Water Impact Report, the 2021 Surat Cumulative Management Area Underground Water Impact Report ('the Surat UWIR').

The Surat UWIR provides for ongoing cumulative impact assessment and management from petroleum and gas development. The Surat UWIR identifies the aquifers that exceed groundwater triggers, assigns tenure holders monitoring obligations and responsibility to make good, affected water bores. The Office of Groundwater Impact Assessment updates its groundwater modelling and assessments every three years through the Surat UWIR. This supports an adaptive framework that allows for mitigation measures to be put in place should there be changes to predicted impacts over time.

The Office of Groundwater Impact Assessment advises modelling of the cumulative impacts of petroleum and gas activities indicate current predicted impacts in the Condamine Alluvium are minimal and water supply bores are not predicted to be affected.

The Queensland Government's coexistence framework has been key to ensuring resource activities can effectively coexist with agricultural activities. The Queensland Government's 'Queensland Resources Industry Development Plan' identifies actions to foster coexistence and sustainable communities, including coexistence between the gas industry and agriculture.

Land access laws in the *Mineral and Energy Resources (Common Provisions) Act 2014* establish the mandatory requirements that a petroleum authority holder must adhere to when entering private land to undertake authorised activities. It also provides that landholders must be compensated for any compensable effects arising from the authorised activities carried out on their property. Additionally, this Act requires a Conduct and Compensation Agreement to be negotiated when more than a minor impact on a landholder's business or land use activities will result from the authorised activities.

The *Regional Planning Interests Act 2014*, administered by the Department of State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning, provides for the identification and protection of areas of regional interest – including priority agricultural areas, requiring resource operations to have a Regional Interests Development Approval unless the activities are exempt activities.

The GasFields Commission Queensland is leading research into coal seam gas-induced subsidence and the impact on productivity and profitability of farming operations. The GasFields Commission Queensland has also released a Report following a regulatory review that includes recommendations for a pathway to monitor, measure and manage impacts associated with subsidence. The Department of Resources is working with other agencies to analyse the recommendations and understand the interrelationships with related initiatives being undertaken across government. This work will help to inform the development of a coordinated Government response to the GasFields Commission Queensland's recommendations.

The Stage 1 CSG Water Monitoring Management Plan has been developed by the proponent to meet their obligations under the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. While the Surat UWIR may assist in informing whether groundwater drawdown or limits outlined in these plans may have been reached, compliance with these plans is the responsibility of the Commonwealth Government.