

# Landholders respond to NSW Gas Plan

The NSW Gas Plan released at the end of last year has generated a mixed response from communities in the north west.

The plan outlines the state government's commitment to improving the environmental performance of existing and future CSG projects, and ensuring the adoption of all recommendations made by the independent Chief Scientist and Engineer, Professor Mary O'Kane.

It's described as a framework to regulate the industry, with a new system for granting Petroleum Exploration Licences (PELs) to be established, as well as certainty around which areas will be released for exploration and to whom.

The plan confirms the freeze on assessing new PEL applications is to remain until the new system is in place and the NSW Government has introduced legislation to extinguish 16 previous PEL applications.

Local reaction to the release of the plan has been varied.

Narrabri farmer Peter Gett has three well sets on his property 'Tintsfield', as well as a land access agreement with Santos.

He said the NSW Gas Plan has put his mind at ease.

"I think the government is listening to the people, I think they're getting the message in terms of what people are expecting out of this, they want security with it," he said.

"I'm for it, I believe we want this, but it's got to be done dead right and I think they're getting the message on that.

"I don't hold anything against the people who are protesting, because what they've done is put my mind at

ease with the pressure they're putting on the gas and coal companies and the government, which has made plans like this come out."

Mr Gett said he had entered into a financially rewarding access agreement with Santos.

He explained how the arrangement with Santos has improved his farm, and future prospects.

"I've got very good road infrastructure, improved fences in their lease area and around the farms," he said.

"I've put the money into my farm management, and I'm also looking at a better superannuation plan.

"It's not about me though, it's about the community. There are many country towns that haven't got much, and here we are with something in Narrabri that will be there when we run into dry times, farmers will still have a bit of extra income and that money will flow back into the community."

Mr Gett does worry about the water that will be taken out of the ground to release coal seam gas deposits.

"I hope the government's got that one right, because our irrigation industry is such an important thing to this whole community, we don't want agriculture to fail," he said.

"We rely on groundwater for our cattle and sheep and for our own household use, though I don't think it will be a problem.

"The harder the government is on the mining companies, the better, there are a lot of very prominent people against this, and I don't hold that against them because they are keeping the government on their toes, making sure these companies do the right thing.



Peter Gett with one of the gas wells drilled on 'Tintsfield', south west of Narrabri.

"As far as I'm concerned, if we don't get the gas now, someone else will get it, but I want it done right, the people who are protesting are only doing a job for me to make sure it is done right.

"It worries me about unsubstantiated claims being made about the coal seam gas industry and Santos" he added.

Mr Gett said the Coonarah gas field, about three km west of the Tintsfield gas well has been in operation for 16 years and there had been no change in water level or water quality.

"Santos has put down water monitoring bores and regularly check everyone's stock and domestic bores in the area, at Santos' own expense, for water quality and levels.

"And the information is provided

every time they do it."

Farmer, Mal Donaldson, whose property borders the Pilliga forest, is concerned that the Gas Plan has arrived 'too late' for the Narrabri Gas Project.

"My biggest disappointment is that it appears the Narrabri project is not going to be subject to the same scrutiny as some of the others," he said.

"I suppose you have to start off with something and it's an okay start, but I'm not very impressed with the fact that existing Narrabri and Gloucester projects are going to be exempt from a lot of the finer details in the new approvals process that new exploration leases are going to have to go through."

He said the plan was lacking detail around waste management, penalties

for environmental breaches, and the parameters around which areas will be made 'no-go zones' for CSG.

"I'm only a farmer, I'm not comfortable being an activist, but having lived next door to the Pilliga all my life and I've seen what goes on and knowing that it is a recharge area for the Great Artesian Basin I think that we really need to be very careful," he said.

"There seems to be a cavalry charge, but maybe you don't have to develop everything straight away because one day our grandkids are going to appreciate the fact that we left something for them."

Member for Barwon Kevin Humphries said the NSW Gas Plan, will ensure landholders share in the benefits of any gas development.

"We will legislate for gas companies to negotiate land access arrangements with landholders at both exploration and production stages and make compensation a requirement of these agreements," Mr Humphries said.

The NSW Gas Plan confirms that Santos has publicly committed to making all gas produced from the project available to the NSW market.

It makes clear the government's intentions to reduce gas exploration licences.

The Gas Plan includes a new Community Benefits Fund to ensure that communities benefit from gas development through local infrastructure projects.

It also confirms the government's intention to explore possibilities to expand gas pipelines to NSW as a way of securing an energy supply and putting downward pressure on household gas bills.