

Coal Seam Gas Forum

In the interests of community debate The Courier has invited interested groups to contribute to a 'Coal Seam Gas Forum' over the coming weeks. Responses to the articles will be included in the Letters to the Editor columns if space permits.

The protection of our water resources a Santos priority

By **PETER MITCHLEY, GENERAL MANAGER SANTOS ENERGY NSW.**

As we work to develop the Santos Narrabri Gas Project, the protection of our precious water resources is one of our utmost priorities.

I say with absolute confidence Santos uses the best available science to explore for and extract natural gas safely and without harm to the environment.

At the forefront of this is ensuring all water resources, including Great Artesian Basin (GAB), are protected.

Recent claims of Santos' Narrabri Gas Project having detrimental impact on the GAB are fundamentally incorrect.

The water we will extract is not from the GAB - it comes from isolated coal seams much deeper underground.

In our proposed project area, the GAB lies between 50 to 250m below the surface, whereas we will target coal seams between 500-1000m underground.

On average there is 250 to 400m of rock which acts as a barrier, separating the targeted coals from the GAB.

Independent and publicly available studies by the CSIRO and Geoscience Australia concluded there is a lack of connection between the GAB and the coal seams.

These same studies explain the major recharge of the GAB in this area is in the Warrumbungles and where the Namoi River crosses the GAB, well away from our project area.

We have used these studies combined with an extensive range of additional data, to enhance our understanding of water.

This includes routine baseline monitoring of over 100 groundwater locations across the Narrabri region and historical monitoring at more than

100 landholder bores.

During the development of the EIS, this information was combined into a regional scale groundwater model.

The CSIRO has reviewed this model and described it as "state of the art" and suited to assess potential impacts on water of CSG extraction in the area.

This model also reinforces the findings of the independent Namoi Catchment Water Study.

This \$4.5 million study was overseen by the former president of the Farmers' Federation Mal Peters and had input from groups including NSW Farmers Association, NSW Irrigators Council, Regional Development Australia and local farmers.

This study found CSG developments far larger than the one we are proposing, would have an insignificant impact on water sources across the catchment.

The study also confirmed the CSG industry can co-exist with agriculture.

The Project, when fully operational, will extract an average of 1.5GL of water a year. That's about the amount of water needed to irrigate 250ha of cotton annually.

To put this into context, there is some 68,800 ha of irrigated cotton in the Namoi catchment area alone.

All water extracted must be licenced by the NSW Office of Water, just as for any other user.

Our Project will be located on about 1,000 ha, less than 1% of the 500,000ha Pilliga, from which we can supply up to half of NSW natural gas needs.

This is the natural gas that heats and powers more than one million homes businesses and industries.

While extracting the natural gas is very important for NSW future energy needs, it is equally important to protect our water resources and Santos is 100% committed to doing this.

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