

## No environmental harm but improvements needed

The NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) has completed investigations into two separate incidents that occurred at the Santos Eastern Pty Ltd (Santos) Narrabri coal seam gas operations in 2013 and 2015.

EPA Chief Environmental Regulator Mark Gifford said the investigations had shown that neither of these incidents resulted in any significant environmental impacts but we have concerns with aspects of the site operations and management.

“The EPA has determined that there are a number of operational improvements that can be made which is why we are issuing Santos with two legally binding *Pollution Reduction Programs (PRPs)*.”

“The PRP’s require Santos to improve its groundwater monitoring and verify the operation of vents and flow lines used within the Narrabri Gas field.

“We will be monitoring the implementation of the PRPs to ensure the company is meeting its obligations,” Mr Gifford said.

“In addition to the PRPs the EPA is impressing upon the company the importance of open and timely communication with the local community, regardless of the size or impact of any incident.

“CSG is a highly emotive issue within local communities around the area. Prompt communication about an incident will assist the community’s understanding of the activities and foster stronger relationships,” he said.

Details of the two incidents are below.

### Santos Tintfield ponds

In May 2013 Santos notified the NSW Government that groundwater monitoring had detected slightly elevated levels of salinity and heavy metals in the vicinity of the Tintfield holding ponds used to hold produced water from Santos’ coal seam gas operations.

“The EPA has now thoroughly investigated the matter and considers there is insufficient evidence to determine if the changes detected in groundwater were the result of leaks from the Tintfield ponds or were from natural factors,” Mr Gifford said.

“The EPA’s investigation involved independent sampling, site inspections and the analyses of all available data relating to the ponds and the associated groundwater monitoring data. We are pleased to confirm that we did not detect any impacts to neighbouring stock and domestic bores,” he said.

“While the EPA acknowledges that it has taken some time to complete these investigations, it was important that the matters were thoroughly investigated. Our investigation raised a number of important

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considerations that required specialised expertise before outcomes could be satisfied. The information gleaned from this investigation will greatly benefit any future investigations of this nature.”

Mr Gifford said that a PRP will be placed on the company’s environment protection licence requiring it to increase its monitoring program and prepare a groundwater monitoring report to examine the source of the elevated concentrations and to evaluate changes to groundwater flow conditions at the site was an appropriate response.

“The PRP will confirm the integrity of the ponds and will be added to monitoring requirements on Santos’ environment protection licence.”

## **Santos Dewhurst Southern Water Flow Line**

In January 2015 produced water was emitted from a high point vent on Santos’ Dewhurst Southern Water Flow Line.

Following an investigation, the EPA will be attaching a PRP to Santos’ environment protection licence requiring strict operation and maintenance requirements for the vents and flow lines used within the Narrabri Gas field to prevent a similar incident from reoccurring.

Mr Gifford said that the EPA undertook an investigation into the operation of the Dewhurst Southern Water Flow Line after a report from the community was made to the EPA’s 24 hour Environment Line on 1 February.

“After careful consideration, the EPA has concluded that Santos did not breach its environment protection licence and that there had been no breach of the *Protection of the Environment Operations Act*, but incidents like this need to be prevented from occurring in the first place.

PRPs are just one of a number of tools the EPA can use to achieve environmental compliance, including formal warnings, licence conditions, notices and directions, mandatory audits, enforceable undertakings and prosecutions.

The public is encouraged to report pollution via the Environment Line on 131 555.

END