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From: Inquiry into Unconventional Gas POV eSubmission Form
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Inquiry Name: Inquiry into Unconventional Gas in Victoria.

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SUBMISSION CONTENT:

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Submission to Inquiry into Unconventional Gas in Victoria

I have lived in South Gippsland for over 40 years. My concerns have come from the threat to this beautiful farming district, a major Australian foodbowl, if coal seam gas development is allowed.

Arguments in favour of the development of the coal seam gas industry appear to follow four broad points: that it will be good for local economic diversification, be a way of contributing to alternative carbon fuel sources, be a safe and well-regulated industry, supported by federal and state governments, and perhaps, because it is inevitable and there is no choice. I want to briefly address each of these points.

1. Good for the local economy and community

Gippsland, and South Gippsland, sits on the one third of the Gippsland Basin that is on land. The other two thirds of the Basin is off-shore, and all of it is layered with hydrocarbon reserves: oil, coal and gas. Most of South Gippsland is under mining licences; the most recent application was approved recently for exploration around the township of Mirboo North.

If CSG is found in economically winnable quantities in South Gippsland, wells will be rolled out across the countryside. It will only be viable if roads and infrastructure are used 'efficiently' by densely located sites, which will operate 24 hrs per day, with horrendous noise levels. Our prime agricultural land will become an industrial wasteland, threatening food security, lives and livelihoods. The jobs created in mining would replace those lost in farming. This is not the economic diversification we want.

2. Contributing to lowering pollution and our carbon footprint

CSG production is toxic and filthy, not clean and green, it is 'an impediment to a clean world' (Munro 2012). CSG uses vast quantities of precious water, est. 300 gigalitres p.a, wells are drilled through aquifers and rock to the coal seam, and the pumped out 'produced water' is toxic, extremely saline and with a wide range of carcinogens, heavy metals and chemicals, both natural and introduced.

A well occupies a small area of land, but settling ponds, salt heaps, chemicals, waste, compression tanks, and a network of roads, occupy vast tracts of land, and are a major invasion into the private land that has been acquired for its development. Landowners come to be seen as trespassers on the companies' leaseholdings.

Risks increase with cumulative developments, especially affecting aquifers, waterways, with huge buildups of salination.

'The water taken from the coal seam is toxic and must be handled with extreme care. The dissolved salts permanently ruin good farming land that the water contacts, making it useless for future agriculture or pastoral production. It is toxic to aquatic life if spilled into creeks or rivers. There is no reasonable or practical method of dealing with the vast amounts of saline water that will be brought to the surface' (Lock the Gate website).

'Over 50% of wells tested in Queensland leak methane. Many landholders have reported instances of methane in their stock watering bores and even household taps' (Lock the Gate).

Methane emissions are 20 times worse as greenhouse gas than CO₂. Leaking and flaring in the US currently accounts for the equivalent of 35m cars pa on the roads. CSG increases emissions.

CSG is a non-renewable resource, and the world needs to develop renewables, which will create far more jobs if we invest appropriately.

3. A safe and well-regulated industry, supported by governments

The industry is self-regulated, with governments generally reliant on information supplied by the industry itself. Environmental regulation is ineffective and the responsible agencies lack the resources to undertake many compliance and enforcement responsibilities (Lock the Gate).

Industry propaganda, which is endorsed by government, makes huge claims for propriety, due process, land protection and community support. The reality in Queensland and NSW reveals environmental destruction, community and livelihood devastation, loss of sustainable resources, pitiful compensation, massive drops in land values with land unsalable: all representing government-backed disenfranchisement.

When landholders are approached for exploration access, it is small companies making the promises, who are in no position to back their claims, they sell out to multinationals once gas is found to be viable. There is then no access to influence / lobby Beijing or New Delhi.

There are no guarantees of security for the gas network, for water, for aquifers, for the safety of chemicals used, for transmission of dangerous chemicals to food, for the safety of wells, the closing down of wells, the restoration of land. Does the contract define who does it, who holds money to cover it? Are they likely to renege/declare bankruptcy/cite a contract loophole/walk away/retreat overseas?

4. Inevitable development, there is no alternative

Landholders in Queensland and NSW have found that they can't trust the process, and therefore it must be resisted.

NSW government has approved CSG mining in Sydney's water catchment areas.

Lobbyists for mining companies are former politicians who know their way round the system.

The industry's practice is to divide and conquer in communities, with secret contracts that sign away rights over land forever, people become CSG refugees – they can't live in gasfields that have become toxic waste dumps.

Gas over-production is currently pushing the price of LNG down and the demand for coal has dropped dramatically. Why start a Victorian CSG industry with its high risk development on high value land such as in South Gippsland? While low risk work in lesser quality terrain may be more expensive, disasters are shockingly expensive, economically, socially, environmentally and politically. We would need to stop and get the science and technology right, which is likely to be impossible, and therefore the imperative really is to close the industry down altogether. Our future must be tied to renewable energy sources: the planet cannot survive any further developments using coal.