

06 July 2015

Hon David Davis
Chairman
Environment and Planning Committee
Parliament House
Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE 3002

Dear Mr Davis,

Re: Parliamentary inquiry into Unconventional Gas - WGCMA Response

Thankyou for the opportunity to provide input in to this inquiry.

Our current role in this field is to assess any potential project against our River Health and Floodplain Management responsibilities under the Water Act and Catchment and Land Protection Act. Any work undertaken to improve our knowledge to provide advice based on the best available science assists us in our statutory functions.

In strategic terms, there are two important plans that provide guidance to the health of the region's catchments and its associated waterways. These are the West Gippsland Regional Catchment Strategy and the West Gippsland Regional Waterway Strategy. A short summary of each is depicted below.

These documents whilst not specifically isolating unconventional gas as a threat to the region's natural assets, do flag the importance of understanding all risks (real and potential).

West Gippsland Catchment Management Strategy

Under the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994* (CaLP Act), the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority (WGCMA) has the responsibility to prepare a Regional Catchment Strategy (RCS) and to coordinate and monitor its implementation. The RCS is the primary planning document that identifies priorities for natural resource management for a six-year timeframe. The aim of the RCS is to provide a framework for the integrated management of catchments, which will maintain long term sustainable land productivity, while also conserving the environment. The RCS was renewed in 2013 and identifies seven Landscape Priority Areas (LPAs). The LPAs represent groups of highly valued natural assets (e.g. aquifers, biodiversity, rivers, estuaries, wetlands, soil and land, coast, marine) that are at most immediate risk. Risks identified in the RCS include threatening processes such as:

- Altered flow or hydrological regimes,
- Barriers to fish passage
- Breached dunes/barrier
- Channel modification

- Climate change related extreme events (e.g. wildfire, flood, storm surge, sea level rise)
- Disturbance of potential acid sulfate soils
- Dredging for port expansion
- Erosion
- Inappropriate fire regimes
- Invasive plants and animals
- Land contamination (as the result of excess nutrients)
- Land use pressure (includes timber harvesting, land and livestock management practices)
- Poor water quality (as the result of excess nutrients, sedimentation, oil spills and other pollutants)
- Potential impacts of emerging technologies
- Recreational infrastructure development and construction
- Recreational use and visitation impacts (includes activities and access)
- Salinity
- Seawalls
- Sedimentation
- Soil compaction (as the result of machinery or livestock)
- Unsustainable extraction of groundwater
- Urban or industrial development
- Vegetation clearing

The RCS sets out a suite of 36 management measures (or high level actions) to address these threatening processes over the life of the Strategy.

West Gippsland Waterway Strategy

The preparation of the West Gippsland Waterway Strategy is a statutory requirement for WGCMA under the *Water Act 1989*.

The purpose of the West Gippsland Waterway Strategy (the Strategy) is to ensure the future management of waterways provides the appropriate environmental conditions to support the range of identified values (environmental, social, cultural and economic). The Strategy provides the framework to guide WGCMA in partnership with the community to manage our rivers, wetlands and estuaries to support environmental, social, cultural and economic values.

The 50 year vision for the Strategy is: Our rivers, estuaries and wetlands are well managed to provide connectivity across our landscape, and are widely valued and appreciated for the benefits they provide.

West Gippsland is a diverse region, characterised by areas of natural forest, areas of high conservation value, fertile floodplains for agriculture, coastal wetlands, inlets and estuaries. The WGCMA is responsible for over 40,000 km of designated waterways across the region, including major rivers and creeks and the tributaries that flow into them. These waterways flow to the Victorian coast, discharging either through the Gippsland Lakes, to coastal inlets and embayments (Anderson Inlet, Shallow Inlet, Corner Inlet) or directly to Bass Strait and the Southern Ocean.

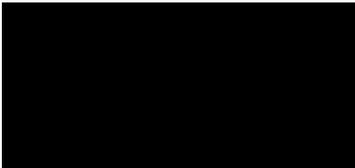
There are a range of threats to West Gippsland waterways which need to be managed to ensure the Waterway Strategy vision is achieved.

In reviewing the terms of reference for this inquiry the above mentioned strategies have most relevance to point two – *“the environmental, land productivity and public health risks, risk mitigations and residual risks of onshore unconventional gas activities”*.

In this regard the key issues with respect to WGCMA's role include those related to improving the understanding of the risks related to planning, exploration, extraction and rehabilitation efforts associated with unconventional gas extraction. This is particularly important with respect to ground water and surface water interactions. This includes the impacts of changed flow regimes on waterway health as well as ensuring pollutants are prevented from entering these natural systems.

Thankyou for the opportunity to respond.

Yours sincerely,



Martin Fuller
Chief Executive Officer