AMA Victoria's submission to the Victorian Parliamentary *Inquiry into Unconventional Gas in Victoria.*

AMA Victoria welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the Parliament of Victoria's Environment and Planning Committee's *Inquiry into Unconventional Gas in Victoria.*

Human health is ultimately dependent on the health of the planet and its eco-system. The Australian Medical Association is concerned with ensuring that any processes or developments that impact on the health of the environment or the community are properly conducted, monitored and managed.

Unconventional gas extraction is relatively new in Australia and the health impacts have not been adequately researched. Of particular concern to the AMA is coal seam gas (CSG) extraction.

CSG is sometimes seen as a relatively clean form of mining in terms of greenhouse gas emission. However, CSG mining extracts a very large volume of water and produces large amounts of waste salt posing a contamination risk to surface and groundwater supplies.

Currently there is insufficient information about the nature and doses of chemicals that are typically used to extract CSG. This lack of information makes it difficult to accurately predict and measure the impacts on human health and the environment. However, a number of the chemicals typically used in CSG extraction have been associated with hormonal disruption, fertility and reproductive effects, and the development of some cancers.

Concerns about the health impacts of CSG extraction are growing and more data is needed on the impact of CSG on contamination or depletion of water resources. The chemicals used in CSG also need to be tested more comprehensively to fully understand the health risks associated with their use.

AMA Victoria urges the government to ensure that:

- All existing coal seam gas extraction projects are regularly monitored for any health impacts and the presence of air and groundwater pollutants in their local environment; and,
- All future proposals for coal seam gas mining are subject to rigorous and independent health risk assessments, and take into account the potential for exposure to pollutants through air and groundwater and any likely associated health risks. In circumstances where there is insufficient evidence to ensure safety, the precautionary principle should be applied.

The above principles should also be applied to Shale Gas and Tight Gas.

Currently, there is a lack of information about the chemicals used and the waste produced, insufficient data on the cumulative health impacts, and a lack of comprehensive environmental monitoring and health impact assessments.

Unconventional gas extraction is likely to continue in Australia despite significant gaps in knowledge of its impact on health and the environment. Appropriate monitoring systems need to be established for unconventional gas developments, and proper assessment of the health implications should be a key part of the approval process.

The assessment of the health impacts of unconventional gas developments need to be strengthened, made consistent across all jurisdictions, and should consider potential intergenerational consequences.