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I am a farmer from Stradbroke in Gippsland and I do not support any form of Unconventional Gas Mining and as such, I would like to make a submission to the State Government's Inquiry into Unconventional Gas.

My husband and I moved to Stradbroke nearly 10 years ago from Melbourne, after we decided to make a lifestyle change from the hustle and bustle of city life, to a relaxed and calming way of life on a small cattle farm. We had no previous experience with farming before we moved, so the knowledge that we now have has been learnt from other farmers in our local community. We have been upgrading the facilities on our farm, sinking a bore at considerable cost, replaced kilometres of fencing and pasture improvement. Our property is only 104 acres with approximately 70 acres suitable for farming, so we therefore cannot sustain large numbers of cattle, but we are still able to operate a beef cattle enterprise, mainly hand rearing calves.

We are 'empty nesters' as our adult children live and work in Melbourne. We are just two 'normal' people who have worked all our lives to own our little piece of Australia - that great Australian dream of owning a property in Australia. We don't have a large investment portfolio on which we can fall back onto, we only have our farm. We are currently in the process of ensuring that our farm will sustain us through the next stage of our lives in semi-retirement when we want to live off the modest income that we are able to produce from our farm. We want to enjoy the fruits of our hard work and enjoy our property. Our Melbourne friends and family love visiting our property for the quietness and fresh air that it provides, as it gives them a break from the pressures of city life.

When we made the decision to move from Melbourne to Gippsland, we knew we would be more disadvantaged as rural regions have higher fuel prices, inferior medical services, inferior mobile phone and internet coverage, no hard rubbish collections, no general rubbish collections and the general poor conditions of rural roads. Yet, all these negatives did not deter us as we thought the lifestyle was worth more to us.

With the threat of Unconventional Gas Mining (UGM), we are fearful that our current way of life is now threatened and all of this hard work might have been for nothing and totally wasted and we absolutely now regret making the move to Gippsland as a result of the Unconventional Gas Mining (UGM) threat.

The main concerns in particular that I have regarding Onshore Unconventional Gas Mining is for our health (both physically and mentally), the loss of our current way of life, loss of the continued use of our bore, loss of the way we currently conduct our business and most importantly, the devaluation and loss of the saleability of our property.

We want to further improve our property and build a dedicated calf shed amongst other things, but we don't want to waste the meagre amount of savings that we have, if UGM comes here and take over.

When we are in a period of low rainfall, we rely on underground water as our dams recede and if the mining companies ruin the underground water by making it toxic or deplete the water by pumping the aquifer dry, our business is completely under threat.

Each day we live our lives with this big dark cloud hanging over our heads. It is not something that we created, we came to Gippsland for a simple life, and now we have this cloud hanging over us. I have suffered from increased stress and anxiety for the past 3 years, caused by the uncertainty of our future, something that we have no control over. The constant worrying about UGM has taken a toll on our lives. My counsellor has often told me that for the sake of my mental health, you should not worry about things you cannot control. Generally this is true, but when you have no control over your entire future, how can we not worry?

In addition to the increased stress and anxiety that I suffer just from the possibility of living in an industrial gasfield, my stress levels are also increased when I hear members of State and Federal governments resort to calling people like me (anti CSG protectors) names. It is absolutely disgraceful for politicians having to resort to calling us names (which is behaviour that you would usually only see in primary schools). Ian Macfarlane has publically referred to the anti CSG protectors as 'anarchists', Peter Reith has publically referred to the anti CSG protectors as 'Greenies with their own political agenda, " and Tim Pallas has referred to anti CSG protectors as 'confused'. I find this name calling disgraceful, as we are just normal citizens, who have never protested before in our lives, we have never felt the need to make political statements, nor do we try to save the world from all atrocities. All we want to do now is stop UGM from invading our farm, our street, our community, our region and our state.

If there was to be UGM in our region, will there be increased mental health services to deal with people like myself and I am sure many other people in the region, who feel depressed and a have sense of hopelessness, which has been caused by the threat of being forced to live in an Industrial Gasfield, especially when 98% of the community does not want UGM in our community?

The threat of any mining on our property is causing my husband and I great distress. We have worked hard to pay our mortgage, improve the property the way we see fit, yet something as sinister as UGM miners can come here and destroy that for us, and we can't even say no to it. We can't even tell them where to put the wells - they can be 100m from our house. How can this happen? How can we have no control over a property that WE purchased, that WE paid the mortgage on, that WE paid the improvements on? How can everything we have worked our entire lives for be threatened, how can our house be made worthless if UGM comes to Gippsland?

It is unimaginable to think that our usually quiet road and our driveway could become a thoroughfare for mining traffic, the trucks, the workers, up and down our driveway. How can we ever feel safe on our own property, when the workers will be driving past or entering our property 24x7, driving past our house. How can we feel safe driving on our narrow roads with the increased volume of traffic and the increased amount of large trucks? We currently keep our dogs and farm animals within the confines of our property. How will we know that our dogs and farm animals won't be run over by the increased traffic on our property or escape through the constant opening of our gates when mining companies enter our property? We will have totally lost our privacy, safety and peaceful way of life.

We have considered selling up and moving, but who would buy our property for its true worth, and then, if it did sell, where would we go that would be safe from UGM? The answer was nowhere, unless we wanted to go back to the city and live.

When we experience heavy rains (usually 75mm or above), our property is usually inundated with water from neighbouring properties, as seen in the pictures below. If there was to be UGM in our region, and there was a holding pond or similar on our property or a property bordering ours. What regulations would be put in place to ensure that the mining company would be able to prevent the contents of that pond from being washed away with the rain water that inundates our property, and then contaminating our neighbours and our property?



Also, once our farmland is considerably wet, the sandy loam remains very wet for some months, and it is very easy for vehicles to get bogged, as seen in the pictures below. If there was to be UGM in our region, how would the Government ensure that the mining company would be able to prevent this from happening without making the rest of our property near useless for farming and difficult to navigate?



Mr Reith has said in a 2013 Weekly Times article "farmers bought land knowing that this was an asset of the people of Victoria." If my farm was an asset of the people of Victoria, why wasn't this listed on the Section 32, which lists so many other covenants relating to the property? If my farm is an asset of the people of Victoria, why did I have to pay a mortgage and General Rates on it instead of being able to lease or rent it? Why do I have the right to refuse access to anyone on my property, except those from Mining companies? When we were in the process of purchasing our home, at no point did we have any idea that our property was covered by a Gas Mining exploration licence. We will continue to fight to keep our land the way it is today, we have paid the mortgage, it is ours, we don't rent it, it is not leased, it is not Government owned land - IT IS OURS, we paid for it.

I feel that the mining companies do not adequately compensate landholders for the inconvenience, lack of privacy, loss of property value caused by UGM. I understand property acquisition when the whole community/state will benefit, i.e. major road infrastructure, or public transport infrastructure, but I can only see negatives by destroying productive farm land and tourism areas for the benefit of a few, mainly international mining companies.

I live in a community that has conducted a survey into Unconventional Gas and 98% of Seaspray and the surrounding area residents have declared that they do not want Unconventional Gas in the area and want the area to remain Gasfield Free. This result clearly indicates that my community has removed the social licence for this industry to operate in our area and we will never support it, no matter what potential regulations are put in place.

I note during the Parliamentary Inquiry that was held in Sale on 1st July 2015, that both Lakes Oil and Ignite Energy/Gippsland Gas stated that they would not enter the properties of landholders who did not want UGM on their land. My question regarding these statements is: if 98% of the area they want to extract gas from is locked up by the community, and the mining companies won't force themselves onto those properties, then how can they expect to operate?

If the Governments were so sure that UGM mining will prosper and it would be what the farmer's want, why don't they give Landholder's the right to say yes or no to mining on their property? If, what they are saying is true, then the Landholders will be jumping on board the UGM train.

I regularly hear businesses and Governments saying that there is going to be a gas shortage, and businesses want to know that they will have access to cheap and continuous gas. If government's genuinely believed that there was going to be a gas shortage, why is there not a Domestic Reservation Policy on a Federal or State level? Surely this would be a responsible way to address the perceived 'gas shortage' and Victorian businesses would have the confidence that they had ample supply of any gas, and it would not simply be extracted and earmarked for the export trade out of Gladstone. The price rise is not an accident or an unfortunate side effect - it is the objective. Gas producers want to sell their gas at a higher price, hence the link for the eastern gas market to the world market. No matter how much UG is extracted in Victoria, the world price isn't going to fall, and therefore gas prices will not drop.

Politicians and Gas Lobbyists regularly say that the Qld farmers are rejoicing at the income they are receiving and that mining and farming can co-exist. Those poor people did not know what they were getting into, and they have signed confidentiality agreements, so obviously they can never tell what they really think about UGM.

Mr Reith has referred to the townships of Tara and Chinchilla as being 'dead' before CSG, and have been brought back to life with this mining boom. Well let me tell you, the town of Seaspray, or Gippsland in general is not dead. You only have to drive out to Seaspray, or through Maffra, Yarragon, Yarram or Bairnsdale and these towns are definitely not 'dead'. They are picturesque, bustling little townships full of wonderful community people and visitors. How could any government even consider ruining these communities and the agricultural industry for short term gain?

I often hear politicians saying that UGM in Tara and Chinchilla is great for the region. That may be so, but it is impossible to compare one geographical area with another. In Queensland, properties can be thousands of hectares in size, whereas in Gippsland, it is more densely populated and most properties would be under 500 hectares. In Queensland, most of the properties are Leasehold, whereas in Victoria they are Freehold, therefore landowners in Victoria have considerably more financial investment in their properties, and effectively have more to lose if property values decline.

Mining Companies will often promise that UGM will increase employment opportunities for local residents? If the current trend of employing FIFO's from WA or NZ continues for Construction employment on any Bass Strait Offshore Construction projects, I can't see the mining company employing local unemployed people, with no experience in this field, for these jobs.

Rob Annells of Lakes Oil claimed on ABC 774 in 2013 that Seaspray is all kangaroos and ferns. Mr Annells also stated at the Parliamentary Inquiry on 1st July 2015, that there were no Dairy Farms in Seaspray and that he was not aware of any community objections. These statements show us that Mr Annells obviously doesn't visit Seaspray, or take any notice of the small communities he wants to ruin, as there is a very large, productive Dairy Farm that shares a boundary with the Lakes Oil owned property where the Wombat wells are situated. He is aware of the community objection. We held the Seaspray declaration day in July 2013 where more than 650 people formed a Human Sign (see picture below) on the Seaspray beach, after 98% of the community did not want Gasfields in this area.



Seaspray and its surrounding areas are not just kangaroos, pine trees and ferns. We have Covinos, one of the largest vegetable farms in Australia already employing 100's of people, productive established dairy farms, beef farms, pig farms, sheep farms and horse studs. Seaspray is also a holiday destination for Melbourne people. His arrogant comment just goes to show that he doesn't really care about the Kangaroos or Ferns either - only the money he is going to receive by devastating our community.

Animals, native vegetation and other flora seem to have more rights than us, as landowners. I think the State's Native Vegetation laws are hypocritical as they only seem to apply to Landowners, as mining companies can just walk in and bulldoze everything in their path, native vegetation included and be allowed to continue with their business.

There has been no community consultation over the past 3 years by local, State or Federal Governments, nor from the mining companies who hold the exploration leases to advise us of what has been going on to date and what is planned for the future. We have often been told that we are 'misinformed' on the subject, but I think that we are all very well informed. We have had to resort to educating ourselves by researching this industry via the internet and forming friendships with other affected people in other states and countries. We know that we shouldn't always believe what we read in the papers or social media, but unfortunately rightly or wrongly, this is the only communication we ever get on the topic.

At the recent Parliamentary Inquiry held in Sale on 1st July 2015, I had a conversation with Tim O'Brien from Lakes Oil, where I questioned him with regard to entering a property that clearly had a 'Lock the Gate' sign on its front gate. At first Mr O'Brien denied it was him, or that it was Lakes Oil, or in that suburb, then eventually he did recall a farmer whose property he did enter to discuss mining, other than UGM. That to me, shows dishonesty and not respecting the Lock the Gate Sign, so how can we trust them to conduct best practices and to follow the regulations. Also, he mentioned during the hearing that Lakes Oil only wanted to drill 12 wells. After the hearing he was questioned on that, and that is only 12 wells to start with, and then there will be more. He would not answer how many wells they have planned for this region. This evasiveness is what causes so much stress and angst. We need to know information of what is possibly going to impact on our lives.

As UGM has been proven to increase the earthquake risk, why would the Government even consider allowing UGM in an area that is already at increased Earthquake risk? A major concern for me is if I will still be able to get Earthquake cover from my House insurance, which I currently get? If not, will we be able to claim damage caused by an Earthquake from the mining companies or government?

The mining companies say that there will not be any damage from UGM, but we all know that damage even from accidents can happen even if best practices are followed. Who will be held accountable if our bore dries up or becomes chemically polluted, when our property is worthless, when there are ugly mines everywhere? Who can we claim compensation from?

What baseline tests on groundwater, soil, people's health will be undertaken? It is imperative to have the baseline tests completed independently before any UGM begins so the mining companies can be held accountable for any adverse affects. Can the government assure us that base testing from the fracking that was undertaken in Seaspray over 10 years ago was conducted, and if so, where can we view the results?

We currently live on a gravel road, who will pay for the new road if the traffic increases? Will we pay for this through our General Rates, or will the State Government or Mining Company pay for these repairs?

Contamination of soil, pasture or groundwater could happen with UGM. When farmers sign the National Vendor Declaration, they could possibly be liable for any product they sell of theirs that is contaminated, if they didn't declare it. How would a farmer know if his soil or underground water is contaminated? Why should they be held liable in the first instance if the soil or underground water is contaminated by the UGM industry?

Farmers/residents and the oil and gas industry (Exxon Mobil in Longford) have co-existed for more than 40 years and this has brought wealth and prosperity to a lot of local people and businesses for a long time. However, with this co-existence, there has also been significant noise and air pollution (as can be seen in the pictures below). There have been several complaints made to the EPA, but the air pollution continues, nearly on a daily basis, but the problems that obviously cause this thick, toxic black smoke never do seem to be resolved. If the Victorian government does allow UGM into my community, it is of great concern that the EPA appears to be letting down the people of Gippsland down immensely with the black smoke that comes from Longford gas plant and the Hazelwood Mine Fire with their pollution monitoring ability. How do we know that any form of pollution that is caused by UGM will be monitored accurately, or that we will be given the actual results, or will it be the same as for Longford Gas Plant and the Hazelwood Mine Fire? What assurances will the government give us that this will not continue to be the case?



Who is responsible for the mining infrastructure that is on our property when the miners move on? This is a major concern for us as in SA, the State Government held a landholder responsible for the rehabilitation of an abandoned mine on their property. Will the Victorian Government make landholders responsible for wells that have been abandoned by the mining companies?

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