

PRESS RELEASE

Resources and Energy Minister Hartcher Leaves Door Open for CSG Mining in the Catchments of the Illawarra and Wollondilly

- Meeting with representatives of the Wollongong Climate Action Network (WCAN) at the Community Cabinet meeting in Kiama, **Minister Resources and Energy Chris Hartcher said that he would not consider banning coal seam gas (CSG) mining in the Sydney Catchment Authority (SCA) Special Areas** while the NSW Strategic Land Use Review and the NSW CSG Inquiry were underway.
- Spokesperson Peter Turner commented “**This effectively leaves open the possibility of CSG mining in the catchments for the Woronora and Warragamba Dams.** These water sources are too important to put at risk for short term revenue gain, CSG exploration and mining should never have been contemplated here.” He added that environmental damage costs could exceed any revenue benefit.
- With no NSW moratorium in place for the duration of either the Review or the Inquiry, **Apex Energy have recently announced their intention to begin drilling at some their 15 approved exploration sites in the Illawarra and Wollondilly.** Evidently surprised by this, the Minister commented that the government was not in the business of making retrospective changes and it was the previous government that had issued the exploration project approval. The O’Farrell government was unsuccessful in its attempt to make retrospective changes to the NSW feed-in tariff scheme. The Minister saw **no need for a moratorium on CSG activity during the course of the NSW CSG Inquiry.**
- WCAN is one of 15 community groups in the region **calling for CSG mining to be banned from the Illawarra and Wollondilly catchments and adjacent green spaces in the public interest, citing the need for water security, biodiversity and habitat protection.** Water security is an increasingly important concern as climate change progresses. A letter detailing the need to exclude CSG from the catchment areas has been sent to the Premier, relevant Ministers, Lee Evans and Jai Rowell.
- The groups note that **while the general public is not allowed into the SCA Special Areas, an industry increasingly caught up in legal action arising from water contamination, blow-outs, explosions and mini-earthquakes has been granted access to these important and sensitive areas.** Whether or not fracking is used, the so called produced water and subsidence associated with CSG mining pose serious threats to the region’s water sources. As the Southern Coalfields Inquiry established, these catchment areas have already been badly damaged by subsidence caused by longwall mining.
- The sensitivity and importance of the Woronora Plateau area has very recently been emphasised in the preliminary **finding in June of the NSW Scientific Committee in favour of a listing of the region's coastal upland swamps as an endangered ecological community.** The report explicitly recognises the threat posed by CSG mining. The fragility of the Wollondilly has been highlighted by the mysterious drying out of the ancient and World Heritage listed Thirlmere Lakes. **Research** just published by scientists at Sydney’s Royal Botanic Garden **shows the importance of green corridors to allow adaptation and migration for the waratah as climate change advances.** Land clearing for CSG pipelines could threaten survival routes for the NSW floral emblem.
- Interviewed for a short film on CSG at one of the sites approved for CSG exploration on SCA Special Area land, geoscientist Dr Ann Young commented that land clearing for wells would severely disrupt the vegetation cover. **Agreeing that CSG mining should be excluded from the SCA Special Areas of the Illawarra and Wollondilly,** Dr Young also commented that while disturbed areas can be rehabilitated to some extent, **it is almost impossible to re-establish the full vegetation cover properly because the soils are permanently damaged.** The approved site is at the very edge of a Woronora Plateau upland swamp; swamps of this kind plays an important role in the Illawarra catchment system
- **Apex Energy NL is a ‘no liability’ company, with 9 of its 15 approved exploration sites on SCA land.** It has limited financial resources.

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