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CSG: short term gains not worth long term risks

For the past few years I have been a vocal opponent against the proliferation of coal seam gas exploration and mining in the Hunter Valley, and I am active member of the Hunter Valley Protection Alliance. As a local resident and property owner, it is fair to say this opposition may have originally stemmed from a NIMBY position (not in my backyard), however after spending many hundreds of hours since researching and writing about the impacts of coal seam gas mining, my concerns are now very much for our country as a whole.

Of course as is the case with most issues, there are two sides to every story. In today's modern world - until efficient, affordable and truly sustainable energy alternatives can be found – I believe we must accept as a necessary evil some forms of mining in certain areas. In addition to servicing our growing energy requirements, as an industry mining provides significant employment, export opportunities and revenue essential to our economy.

However the benefits of mining – social as well as fiscal - must always outweigh the long lasting negatives. In relation to coal seam gas mining in particular, it is vital we look closely at the very real risks – proven in coal methane grounds throughout the world - before moving further forward in any way.

Talking specifically about the Hunter Valley, our region is Australia's oldest and most visited wine district, attracting close to 3 million visitors each year. It is home to over 230 winery related businesses, and the combined viticulture and tourism industries provide close to 50,000 direct and indirect jobs - delivering over \$1.8 billion annually to the NSW economy.

As demonstrated overseas, CSG mining has the potential to cause irreversible, long term damage to underground water aquifers; generates huge amounts of saline mining waste; releases fugitive methane emissions; causes aesthetic destruction of the natural landscape; impacts negatively upon property values; and in relation to the Hunter, has the potential to stem the flow of the many hundreds of thousands of domestic and international visitors whom travel to the region each year.

While the gas companies remain publicly dismissive of the mounting scientific evidence against CSG mining, one issue which cannot be ignored is the detrimental impact both the perception and reality of CSG mining will have on the Hunter Valley's burgeoning wine and tourism industries.

Attractive vineyards, quaint restaurants, historic cellar doors and boutique accommodation will all be under threat from dwindling visitor numbers if rendered unappealing by being situated adjacent to unsightly gas wells. The tranquil appeal of the rural landscape will be lost to a checkerboard of drilling sites and access roads, and the sounds of native birdlife will be drowned out by transport carriers and high machinery.

Both the South Australian and Western Australian governments are aware of the impact mining would have on their high-yielding winery tourism areas (including The Barossa, McLaren Vale and the Margaret River), and have sensibly moved to 'ring fence' them from any future industrial or other inappropriate over development. In light of the many, many

millions of dollars the Hunter Valley wine and tourism industries deliver to the NSW economy each year, it is time a similar move is taken here too.

For me, one of the most compelling factors in the whole debate is that CSG mining has a life cycle of only 10 to 15 years, yet the potential devastation it may cause to the landscape - both environmentally and aesthetically - may last a life time.

The first vines in the Hunter Valley were planted in 1823. Since then the region has grown from strength to strength, delivering strong returns for the State Government and Australia as a whole. If protective policies are put in place now to 'ring fence' the Hunter Valley - and other prime agricultural and tourism areas - from further mining, their future will be assured for many generations to come.

Graeme Gibson, representative of the Hunter Valley Protection Alliance.