

# GAS WATCH 218.

## "Abbott backs farmers' right to say NO"

*"Miners should not go onto farms if they're not wanted. It's very wrong and they shouldn't be going onto land where the relevant land owners don't want them." – Tony Abbott 2/5/13*

**We asked [Joel Fitzgibbon](#) and [Michael Johnsen](#):**

**"Whilst we are all aware that the State Governments grant Mining Licences and CSG Licences, how do you see a Federal Government legislating to establish a landholder's right to say "no"; how would you define farmland; when in the first term of Government would this take place; any available detail as to how such legislation would operate.**

### **BOTH CANDIDATES:**

**Johnsen** based his response on "CSG is seen as a transitional energy source and is proven to be less emitting of carbon dioxide. It is also potentially more efficient". Unfortunately Johnsen has obviously not considered the science which says that CSG is likely to be a dirtier fuel than coal and that the CSG industry has underestimated methane leakage from wells by 62,000,000 tonnes over 3 years ( [www.tai.org.au](http://www.tai.org.au) ) and that the huge issue of disposal of contaminated water is unresolved.

**Fitzgibbon** takes delight in having been wooed by AGL Energy which appears to have convinced him that diluting salt contaminated water and putting that salt contaminated water onto pasture is a good thing. It doesn't matter how much you dilute it, the salt is still there and must eventually contaminate the ground. This speech was before the knifing of Julia Gillard and before Fitzgibbon was Rudd's Minister for Agriculture. Perhaps he's now changed his mind.

Make up your own mind. Not much comfort from either of them. Fortunately the O'Farrell Government has bound itself to legislating CSG exclusion zones in the Hunter Valley and around residential areas in the State, so any reliance on the Federal Government in our area will be somewhat mitigated.

### **Michael Johnsen:**

*"The Nationals at a federal level have a position on CSG that it would take to the table in the further development of an energy policy, where it relates to CSG.*

*The points are;*

- *No coal seam gas development should proceed where it poses a significant impact to the quality of groundwater or surface water systems. It must be absolutely clear that no coal seam gas development should occur unless it is proven safe for the environment;*
- *Prime agricultural land is an increasingly important natural asset. It must be protected from activities that destroy its capacity to deliver food security – not only for our nation, but for a hungrier world, for generations to come;*
- *Coal seam gas development must not occur close to existing residential areas. People who have bought homes, with a reasonable expectation of being well away from mining operations, must not be thrown into turmoil by coal seam gas operations springing up on their doorstep;*
- *Landowners are entitled to appropriate pecuniary returns for access to their land. Remuneration for landowners should not be merely compensation; and;*
- *The regions that deliver much of the wealth from coal seam gas developments deserve to see a fair share of the generated revenues reinvested in their communities. There is an opportunity to grow our nation and encourage a lasting legacy from coal seam gas developments."*

### **Joel Fitzgibbon:**

This candidate didn't address the questions, but merely sent a copy of his speech to the House of Reps on 21<sup>st</sup> March, 2013. A copy of his speech is attached.



[www.huntervalleyprotectionalliance.com](http://www.huntervalleyprotectionalliance.com)

21<sup>st</sup> August, 2013. Contact: Graeme Gibson 65791062

## SPEECH

<b>Date</b> Thursday, 21 March 2013	<b>Source</b> House
<b>Page</b> 2941	<b>Proof</b> No
<b>Questioner</b>	<b>Responder</b>
<b>Speaker</b> Fitzgibbon, Joel, MP	<b>Question No.</b>

**Mr FITZGIBBON** (Hunter—Chief Government Whip) (12:18): I plan to be very brief because we do have a very important event attached to the apology coming up very, very soon, but it is necessary for me to speak on this bill. I am very keen to speak on this bill and any amendments, because I am the member for Hunter and this initiative, which has been brought forward by the minister for the environment, is very relevant to my electorate.

I have a particular dislike for regulation. Overdone, it has the potential to strangle business and constrain our economy. But regulation, whether we like it or not, is a necessary evil. It maintains civil society, protects us from the excesses of the market and addresses market failure. The real challenge is to get the balance right. I have seen many unnecessary regulations from government at every level and of all political persuasions. Most people could readily cite an example of a stupid regulation and the waste of resources involved in enforcing that regulation. If you were looking for obvious people to ask, I suggest you turn to anyone who runs a small business.

Even though I would prefer that the Commonwealth had not found it necessary to intervene in this area, I do not put this particular initiative in the category of bad regulation. I would put this in the category of necessary intervention. I do so because, even though it involves an overlap with the various state governments, it also addresses the shortcomings of those state government planning processes. It also has great potential to restore some confidence in those planning processes which are so important in many communities, but very, very important in communities like the ones I represent because they have seen the excesses of development. Coal mining has brought wonderful and great wealth to the Hunter, but it has also brought environment problems, capacity constraints and other issues. Some of those environmental questions will live with us for a long, long time to come. I remain a very, very strong supporter of the coal mining industry. But we must ensure we get the balance right and are not in any way threatened in our water tables, for example, and the sustainable industries that strive as a result of the availability of clean and unpolluted water.

Coal seam gas is a wonderful resource for this country. It addresses our looming gas shortage. People will maybe come to understand that when they realise the

price effect of shortages in gas and, ultimately, the effect of not being able to access gas. But again, just like coal mining, we cannot allow gas to come on line if there is a threat to our natural environment. I do not promote zero tolerance, by the way. We have never applied zero tolerance to any industry. We would not have too many industries proceeding if they presented any form of environmental problem. Again, there is an important balance. I believe this initiative gets the balance right. It brings the science into the arrangement. I welcome the investment by the minister in the scientific panel—some \$230 million. It is a great initiative. It will restore confidence in planning approvals and processes, so I welcome the intervention.

I took the opportunity to inspect one of AGL's projects in a small village called Broke in my electorate. The gas drilling is taking place outside the village. Where they are exploring, they are using the extracted water to irrigate a vineyard which they have purchased, just to demonstrate some of the benefits. The water-saving is, I think, 20 per cent. They take the water out, dilute it with both rainwater and water from the Hunter River, let it settle and use the water to irrigate their vines. It is a pretty impressive example of how good the industry can be—providing gas supply, wealth and jobs, and water-saving comes with it. If we get it right it can be a wonderful thing for the Hunter Valley, bringing similar wealth as coalmining without anything like the footprint that open-cut coalmining brings, for example. But we have to get the balance right and I think this initiative strikes the right balance.