

GAS WATCH 232.

Government's mapping identifies CSG zones.

Yesterday, Ministers Hazzard and Stoner announced that “*Horse and Wine Industries Declared a CSG-Free zone*”.
[...well mostly...]

The Department of Primary Industry (mapping) has:

1. To the credit of this Government, confirmed the 2km exclusion zone around residential areas, which now includes the Hunter Valley villages of Broke, Bulga, Camberwell and Jerrys Plains. This is a great step forward in the protection of those villages and their environments.
2. Confirmed some Critical Industry Cluster (CIC) exclusion zones.
3. Not gone far enough in that it has not declared a Critical Industry Cluster exclusion for the whole of the Broke Fordwich winegrowing region (from Paynes Crossing to Warkworth including Broke, Bulga, Fordwich and Milbrodale) but has, rather, declared 5 different, remote and non-contiguous viticulture Critical Industry Clusters within that region. This course is unfathomable. We now have the possibility of CSG companies able to set up their gasfields in between vineyards, cellar doors, restaurants and tourist accommodation houses in some areas. This has the potential to destroy the wine and wine tourism industry in the Broke Fordwich wine region, the first registered winegrowing region in NSW and the second in the whole of the nation. We hope that the Planning Department will see that separating the Broke Fordwich area into 5 distinct CICs is untenable from a planning viewpoint.
4. Been persuaded by AGL and the mining industry lobby to allow existing landowners as of September, 2012 to opt out of CICs. This means that, so far as Broke Fordwich is concerned, AGL can seek to opt out of the CIC in respect of part of its property at Pooles Rock near the Broke village, and perhaps part of its property known as Yellow Rock adjacent to the Broke village. Exactly what areas will be able to be accessed will depend upon the interpretation of the legislation. It appears that because Yellow Rock was not viticultural land, then it will not be able to be accessed for CSG activity, but AGL will surely argue otherwise. The 2km residential exclusion zone around the village of Broke will affect both those AGL properties and upon our reading of the legislation, AGL will not be able to conduct any CSG activities within the area of those properties which lies within that residential exclusion zone.
5. In adopting an “opting out” provision, created a major inconsistency with existing planning rules. It seems bizarre that the Government will allow the CSG and other mining industry companies to determine that they can voluntarily exclude land which they own, based on past ownership irrespective of these being within the boundaries of a CIC. This could impact on not only the pristine vineyards of the Hunter Valley, but also on the wine tourism industry and the environment as a whole.

Hopefully AGL will now look at the surface area which remains available to them within the vineyard area, they will listen to the community, they will be mindful of the environment and the water resources, and they will decide that, commercially, the vineyard area is unviable.

Many landholders made individual submissions to the Government. The Department said that they hadn't had time yet to respond to each landholder, however you can check on the cadastral mapping whether or not your submissions have been accepted and whether or not your land has been protected. See the attached mapping instructions sheets. If you sought inclusion and you're not there, urgently go back to the Department before the maps are issued and they go Planning. It might be too late after that.

Our unrelenting lobbying over the past 8 or 9 years to have the vineyard areas excluded from CSG mining has been a great success. The Government has taken great strides, but hasn't done enough and the risk is still there for us all. We can't afford to take our eye off the ball for one minute.

You would hope at this stage AGL would see the light and listen to the community, to the State Government, the Federal Government and local Government, each of whom don't want CSG in or near vineyards or residential areas, and that it will withdraw its presence from the winegrowing and equine regions.



www.huntervalleyprotectionalliance.com

29th January, 2014. Contact: Graeme Gibson 0418 239359.