

GAS WATCH 38.

THERE IS ALWAYS A RISK.

Sydney Gas has recently sent its new look “*Gas Exploration News*” to some residents of the Hunter.

If you haven't received a copy, ring the Sydney Gas Community line on 02 9751 2067 and ask them to send you one. Unfortunately there does not appear to be a free call number, you will have to pay the STD costs yourself.

Let's have a look at some of the “*news*”.

Quieter Drilling in the Hunter. The claim here by Sydney Gas is that “*the community wants drilling operations to be as quick and as quiet as possible.*” The fact is that, apart from the odd landholder who has signed an access agreement, the community doesn't want the drilling at all, let alone quick and quiet. Our area is unique. Over 70% of the surface area of the land in our area is inaccessible to Sydney Gas by virtue of the buffers required by the PEL conditions and by the Petroleum (Onshore) Act. In addition there are areas which shouldn't be accessible, and that is through and under any aquifers risking our water supply.

Core Conclusions. No real *Conclusions* at all, just a drilling report.

Next steps in exploration.

Test wells.

Tells us they are going to now drill “pilot test wells in the Broke and Bulga area”. Doesn't tell us anything about them; doesn't tell us what they are; doesn't tell us where they are; doesn't tell us how they differ from core holes; doesn't tell us what effect these wells will have on the aquifers and water tables; doesn't tell us whether or not they will be removing gas; doesn't tell us whether or not they will be flaring gas; doesn't tell us whether or not they will be removing water; doesn't tell us what increase in traffic there may be; doesn't tell us what equipment will be used; doesn't tell us whether or not a further REF or, preferably a full Environmental Assessment is required. Really doesn't tell us anything other than they are just going to do it.

Upper Hunter activities.

Let's hope they aren't drilling through aquifers in the Upper Hunter. There is nothing in the *News* to tell us, one way or the other.

Seismic surveys.

The seismic surveys conducted on behalf of Sydney Gas in the Broke and Bulga areas resulted in significant damage to the road surfaces. That was months ago and it appears that temporary repairs are still in place. Apparently Sydney Gas is going to pay, or has paid, for those repairs. Perhaps if they had used the small 4WD vehicles described in the REF rather than the huge trucks that were actually used, the roads would not have been damaged and the community would not have been inconvenienced.

Remember back in the middle of last year.

This is a photograph which Sydney Gas put in its Seismic Acquisition Review of Environmental Factors, as lodged with the Department, showing the proposed seismic acquisition vehicles:



This is a photograph of the vehicles which were actually used in the Sydney Gas seismic acquisition survey.



Gas 101 – Water aquifers.

This article is obviously designed to inspire confidence that Core Holes won't threaten our waterways. The next step is of course exploration wells and then, maybe, production wells. Sydney Gas doesn't address these issues.

There is always a risk.

For example: *“Dewatering changes the hydrological environment - due to drainage of the aquifer and reduction of ground water resources. Lowering of the groundwater table changes groundwater recharge and discharge and causes catchment modifications. (Razowska L, Journal of Hydrology 244 (200) 17-32 Polish Geological Institute December 2000).”*

The United States Bureau of Land Management estimates that one coal bed methane (CBM) well can lower aquifer levels by 34 feet within 10 feet of the well. In the Powder River and San Juan Basins the level of water wells near CBM development have repeatedly dropped by over 200 feet. Artesian wells that tap into coal beds have completely disappeared.”

There is always a risk.

As the General Manager of Sydney Gas announced to a recent meeting at Wollombi : *“I'm not going to say there's a zero chance of water contamination”*.

Not only is there this real risk to our aquifers and water tables (and consequently our rivers and streams) there is the real risk of the release of methane into the soil (killing plant life), bores and the atmosphere.

“Once coal bed gas is liberated by the withdrawal of water reducing the hydrostatic head, the methane is free to migrate. Geological structures, inadequately cemented conventional gas

wells and extraction of produced water from coal bed methane wells can contribute to natural gas resource losses and to methane migration into surface soils and groundwater. As methane production progresses, seeps can find their way into domestic water wells, or the presence of gas seeps in pastures, manifested by dead vegetation.

“Both local and overseas experience shows that fundamental changes in underground pressures can result in serious escapes of methane gas into the environment. Elsewhere this has taken the form of soil poisoning and vegetation destruction, methane venting into nearby wells, surface gas escapes...”

“In September 2004, within a fortnight of the beginning of gas testing, a coal bed methane well north of Newcastle, NSW, was shut down as several boreholes up to 300m away began to blow off methane gas. This was the first reported case of a serious migration of methane gas from coal bed methane operations in New South Wales.”

(Independent hydrogeological reports – January 2005.) Of course, Sydney Gas and also the Department have attempted to discredit the reports, which were not commissioned by Sydney Gas, but where there are differing scientific views –

there is always a risk.

Degassing gas myths.

Unfortunately the response given here, in relation to the question of whether or not there will be increased traffic on our local roads, has been restricted to core hole exploration and clearly worded to minimise concerns of our community.

But, if we they take a step beyond coreholes, namely fracturing coal seams for gas extraction, then it's simply a matter of mathematics.

If they drill 300 wells in the Broke and Bulga areas (a figure from Sydney Gas, although they have since said it could be less than 300), and they inject one million (1,000,000) litres of water (Sydney Gas figure) into each well, and then remove one million litres plus of contaminated water (Sydney Gas figure) from each well, then that's over six hundred million litres of water (600,000,000) which has to be moved.

If this water was carried by, say, 10,000 litre capacity tankers then that is sixty thousand (60,000) truck movements. Sixty thousand truck movements over our rural roads and bridges.

So there you have it. The Gas Exploration News. Has it really told us anything? Is it community consultation and information? What do you think?

**DON'T RISK OUR WATER!
DON'T RISK OUR FUTURE!
DON'T RISK OUR INDUSTRIES!
DON'T LET SYDNEY GAS ONTO YOUR LAND.
LOOK OUT FOR YOUR COMMUNITY.**

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