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Chief's Scientist report does not answer simple question: is it safe?

The NSW Chief Scientist and Engineer, Professor Mary O'Kane, has released a new report to "specifically examine the cumulative impact of all activities which impact ground and surface water in the Sydney Water Catchment Special Areas".^[1] The report does not investigate whether or not coal seam gas mining in our drinking water is safe.

The report notes that it "is impossible at present given insufficient geological, geophysical and hydrogeological data available on current activities" to measure impacts "with quantitative precision". It recommends changes to assess cumulative impacts on the Catchment, while also stating "current activities should proceed while this data is gathered". Stop CSG Illawarra spokesperson Jess Moore commented:

"This report cannot be used as the basis for green lighting CSG development in our catchment. It doesn't answer the simple question: is it safe?"

"It advocates that current activities proceed, making no comment on new activities.

"Communities have told this government time and time again that the risks of CSG mining are not ok in our catchment. Drinking water is off limits."

"CSG mining always involves unearthing water that is high in salt and methane, and can contain toxic and radioactive compounds and heavy metals. CSG drilling in the Pilliga poisoned an aquifer with uranium.

"The previous 'interim' report noted risks to soil, groundwater and surface water systems posed by CSG mining, and showed that it will likely release toxins and salts, and that it can release heavy metals and radioactive compounds."

The report stated: "Produced water brought up from the hydrocarbon-bearing coal seam will likely contain hydrocarbons in the form of volatile organic compounds (VOCs). Concern has been expressed about these compounds, such as benzene toluene, ethylbenzene and xylene (BTEX) chemicals, being volatilised from the liquid phase into the gas phase as an air emission."

"There is the potential for changes in hydraulic connectivity and conductivity to impact connected groundwater bodies and as well as surface water bodies..."^[2] Moore continued:

"This government promised to ban mining in our catchments and we continue to call on them to honour their promise.

"The legislation must change, and our community will fight until it does.

"A permanent ban on CSG in drinking water catchment areas is simply common sense."

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[1] http://www.chiefscientist.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/44485/140530_SCA-Report-Final-Combined.pdf

[2] <http://www.chiefscientist.nsw.gov.au/coal-seam-gas-review/initial-report-july-2013>