



Stop CSG Illawarra
PO Box 5022, Wollongong NSW 2520
Phone: Jess Moore 0416 232 349
www.stop-csg-illawarra.org
info@stop-csg-illawarra.org

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We need a moratorium on all CSG projects

On July 21 the O'Farrell Government announced changes to coal seam gas rules. For new, but not existing, approvals there will be: a moratorium on new fracking until December 31; a ban on the use of evaporation ponds; miners will require a water licence to extract more than 3 million litres of groundwater per year; a ban on the use of BTEX chemicals (benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene and xylenes) as additives during coal seam gas drilling; and an obligation to put the details of mining approvals and conditions online. Spokesperson Jess Moore stated:

"These changes mark small steps in the right direction, and reflect the strength of the community campaign to date, but are completely inadequate.

"If the government acknowledges the need for a moratorium on new fracking projects - given the risks it poses to water and agriculture - it should declare a moratorium on *all* fracking, because the same concerns apply.

"The December 31 deadline is completely arbitrary. This industry cannot be adequately regulated until the full impacts of CSG mining are known. For that we need a full moratorium until the outcome of a Royal Commission.

"While the banning of BTEX for drilling is a positive step, the fact remains that BTEX can occur naturally in coal seams and be present in water that must be drawn out of the seam to access the gas.

"There's rhetoric in the government announcement about community consultation but substance is what we need. The only concrete commitment is to put approved sites and conditions online for people to access. Telling communities where they stand *after the fact* is not consultation.

"We are worried because *all* CSG mining involves contaminated water, not just fracking. The extraction of gas draws water out of the coal seam that is highly saline and can contain toxic and radioactive compounds, and heavy metals.

"An executive member of APEX told us that they are considering draining this water through the geology of the escarpment, into coastal waters, to minimise the use of evaporation ponds and road tankers for disposal.

"*All* CSG mining is a fire hazard, as wells, processing plants and pipelines leak.

"*All* CSG mining risks a range of health impacts such as heart, lung, kidney and neurological problems and cancer.

"It is clear the government is moving too slowly and that these measures fall far short given the threats posed by CSG. The fact remains that this industry does not have a social licence to proceed. Local MPs need to listen to and back the community."

Stop CSG Illawarra is campaigning locally for: a Royal Commission into all impacts of CSG mining; a moratorium on CSG mining until the outcome of the Royal Commission; and a ban on fracking.

Media enquiries: Jess Moore 0416 232 349.