



Stop CSG Illawarra
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Status of Illawarra CSG project unclear

Development consent for all coal seam gas (CSG) wells in the Illawarra - approval to drill and run them - has expired. But exactly what this means for the project is unclear.

Fifteen wells were approved for development under Part 3A in 2009, a determination amended to include a sixteenth well in 2011. However, the determination states that drilling and operation of the wells must take place within three years and before the expiry of one of two relevant licences, unless the director-general of the planning department steps in. [1] The two relevant licences – PEL 442 and PEL 444 – expired in February and April this year.

Stop CSG Illawarra spokesperson Jess Moore phoned the Department of Planning and Infrastructure to confirm that development could not proceed at this time. She was told that the Department does not know, and that a lawyer would have to determine what 'expiry' means. Moore stated:

"My drivers licence expires this month, and no amount of quibbling over the definition of 'expiry' will change this.

"It is astounding that the planning department cannot tell us if drilling can happen at this time.

"Communities have been excluded from decision making about CSG, and still are not able to find out the status of CSG projects.

"Where is the transparent process Barry O'Farrell promised? For all his rhetoric about working with communities, the public is still being kept in the dark when it comes to CSG.

"Who does the Government work for?

"The Government should put a freeze on the CSG industry pending the results of a Royal Commission; that is, a science-first approach to an industry that poses serious risks."

"The Government needs to listen to communities."

Stop CSG Illawarra wrote to the NSW Department of Planning and Infrastructure on Monday, June 4 2012, asking if drilling can happen at this time. No response has been received to date.

The Illawarra Mercury reported that "the expiry of PEL 442 means that at present the firm will not be able to drill its boreholes". However a NSW Trade and Investment spokesperson told them "PEL 444 - and associated approvals - remain in force until the renewal application is determined". [2] A Department of Resources and Energy spokesperson told the St George and Sutherland Shire Leader that "the company cannot explore of the 15 boreholes unless both PELs are in place". [3] The spokesperson did not mention the sixteenth well, approved in 2011.

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[1] <https://majorprojects.affinitylive.com/public/65ab6b8a00f0e0892033e31e923f16ef/Project%20Approval.pdf>

[2] http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/news/local/news/general/coal-seam-gas-drilling-plan-invalid/2582675.aspx?story_page=0

[3] <http://www.theleader.com.au/news/local/news/general/coal-seam-drilling-suffers-a-setback/2582535.aspx>