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Media Release: 15th March, 2013

Water Trigger Does Not Live up to Hype

This week, Federal Environment Minister Tony Burke announced that coal seam gas (CSG) projects that could affect water resources will now trigger Federal approval [1]. The bill – detailing the proposed changes to the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) – was tabled this week. Stop CSG spokesperson Jess Moore commented:

"This trigger does not live up to the hype from Burke.

"All the trigger does is bring some CSG projects in for possible consideration. That's all. There is no guarantee that it will then be assessed and there is no guarantee that the changes will stop projects or prevent damage to water resources.

"Federal protection of water is needed, but these changes fall far short in the detail – providing no objective, quantifiable protection.

"The bill does not even mention drinking water catchments, when CSG – and the industrial development and toxic risks it brings - should be banned in these areas.

"The bill fails to define trigger points beyond an abstract definition of significant [2]. The Federal Government needs to tell the public what they consider significant, and what they do not. For example, how much groundwater draw down will be allowable before a project will be stopped?

"The proposal makes the Environment Minister the sole decision maker. The Minister will take advice from the *Independent Expert Scientific Committee* on the impacts on water resources, but purely as information to be considered.

"Ministerial discretion was one of the huge problems with the infamous Part 3A.

"The referral to the Minister will require CSG companies to declare if a project may have a significant impact on water. Are we seriously expected to believe that CSG companies will declare significant impacts, against their financial interest?

"This week's announcements tell us that responsibility for protecting water resources can be taken by the Federal Government, but that this is not yet a job they are serious about.

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[1] http://www.afr.com/p/national/burke_adopts_water_trigger_over_2K65B8Mma6WVX7dqrBpnjN

[2] "Significant" is defined as an impact which is "important, notable, or of consequence, having regard to its context or intensity": <http://www.environment.gov.au/epbc/about/2013-amendments-q-and-a.html>