

Concern that CSG research is too fragmented

The Basin Sustainability Alliance (BSA) is appealing to researchers and government to ensure that research into coal seam gas extraction is collaborative and transparent.

The call comes following the announcement that The University of Queensland is establishing a new centre of excellence for research and education into coal seam gas (CSG).

BSA, which represents concerns of landholders and rural communities on CSG matters, is calling on the new centre to undertake independent scientific studies which will help understand the risks associated with water extraction and the environmental impacts of the CSG industry.

“While we certainly welcome the announcement that there is to be more research into CSG, we are disappointed that it has taken an uprising of opposition to the CSG industry to force the research that should have been done long before the ‘gas rush’ began.

“We have concerns that much of the scientific work that has been done to date is disjointed and not sufficiently focussed on the environmental sustainability of the industry.”

Transparency of research is a concern for BSA.

“This research will be partly funded by industry and government, so we sincerely hope that the research is transparent given that the specialist centre will be funded by those who stand the most to gain from the industry going ahead.

“It’s a catch-22. It’s only right and fair that these companies, who stand to make massive profits from the industry, put money into research to ensure they are doing their work sustainably, but at the same time we are concerned about industry-funded research as we do fear that funding may steer research direction and outcomes.

“The community must be able to trust the results of the research being conducted. For that to happen, the research must be truly independent and peer reviewed,” Mr Hayllor said.

Chair Ian Hayllor said that BSA would urge the new centre to review the state of knowledge in all aspects of CSG development, and that the researchers would collaborate with other research centres.

The Gas Industry Social and Environmental Research Alliance (GISERA), a partnership between the CSIRO and big industry player Australian Pacific LNG, has also been recently established.

“We urge both UQ and GISERA to collaborate closely with all other research centres across Australia that are conducting studies in this field, to enable the Government to base policy decisions on good science.

“We ask that these research centres draw on the real knowledge on the ground and put resources into building on this knowledge rather than duplicating it.

“They must all work together. Fragmenting the research will only breed competition among researchers and take away the potential for this research to protect our vital land and water resources and ensure the sustainability of Australia’s food and fibre production.

“We’d like to see the centre have open dialogue and communicate outcomes with landholders, community, GISERA and USQ and the other research centres. Lastly, the move to offer advanced educational programs into CSG is a greatly welcomed.”

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