

Senate report highlights concerns

The Basin Sustainability Alliance (BSA) has welcomed the Senate Inquiry interim report which it says highlights the importance of agriculture and the uncertainty that exists around the potential for the coal seam gas (CSG) industry to cause long term damage to both land and water supplies.

Chairman of the BSA, a group that represents concerns of landholders and rural communities, Ian Hayllor said the report strengthened calls for scientific research to precede CSG development.

“The Senate committee picked up on many issues raised by BSA over the last 18 months, particularly the importance of the Great Artesian Basin to rural areas and the fact that production approvals for Santos, QCLNG and APLNG were given prematurely before the necessary research and assessments were done.

“It also draws attention to the concerns we have about the short term duration of the coal seam gas industry which operates in and amongst rural and agriculturally productive areas.

“We certainly welcome a more coordinated approach to water resource management which recognises the sustainable use of the Great Artesian Basin”.

Mr Hayllor said one of the important statements in the report was the recommendation that legislation be amended so that arbitration bodies give ‘priority to the maintenance of agricultural production with minimal disruption’ in deciding any land access dispute.

“There has been an imbalance of power with many landholders feeling like it’s a David and Goliath battle with CGS companies. By putting focus back on the importance of agriculture we may see improved relations between the two industries.

He said he was pleased to see the Senate Committee support BSA’s proposal that land access and compensation agreements that have already been entered into should be subjected to review.

“While we have seen vast improvements in the way companies are dealing with landholders, too many people entered into agreements back before many of the risks and interferences were truly appreciated,” he said.

Mr Hayllor urged Government to seriously consider the report’s recommendations saying it was “important that the time and money spend in undertaking this inquiry results in some genuine outcomes.”

Dalby Landholder and Vice Chair of BSA Anne Bridle, who gave evidence to the senate Hearing, welcomed the committee’s recommendation for the federal and state governments to conduct a thorough review of the appropriateness of Adaptive Management in regulating the industry.

“This is a critical finding, with three major LNP projects now approved in Queensland, we must have the absolute assurance that the industry can be restrained or stopped if something goes terribly wrong.

“Currently, we lack confidence in Adaptive Management Regime and worry that it is not robust enough. People that are living and operating rural businesses in amongst these gas fields, need to know that the government has the capacity to follow through and regulate against environmental harm.

“It was heartening to see the Senate Committee pick up on this key concern and make recommendation that governments have a good hard look at whether Adaptive Management can really work.”

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