

## **Time for a Reality Check on CSG**

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Since the 1970's every rural community in Queensland has experienced the same decline. Populations have reduced, businesses have closed and kids have been forced to go to the city for a career.

Now with the realisation that much of central and southern inland Queensland sits atop a world class coal seam gas energy resource that can provide cleaner energy to the world that decline has slowly started to be reversed, for some communities at least.

I believe that the constant negativity and what can only be described at times as scaremongering is creating unnecessary anxiety and fear in much of the rural community and preventing us from pursuing the opportunities the coming development will present.

So I believe it is time for a reality check on the CSG issue.

The reality is that the CSG industry is not new to Queensland. It has operated quite successfully for over 10 years in an area from Moura to south of Chinchilla and west to Roma and Injune. A significant part of that area including some of the first fields developed at Dawson, Scotia and Peat are in my electorate of Callide.

As far as I am aware over that 10 year period no landholders have been ruined by the CSG industry operating on their properties. There are many hundreds of landholders who have negotiated access agreements with gas companies. Some have done so reluctantly but some have negotiated an agreement that now provides a valuable income source for their farming business

Neither am I aware of any water aquifer that has been destroyed or any landholder that has lost their water supply and after ten years those effects should by now be apparent. I am aware of many landholders who have access to additional water supplies and there are even some new irrigation schemes where none previously existed.

There is no indication that I can see that the food producing capacity of the area has been reduced since CSG production began. The reality is that if given access to a little more money and a little more water I would back every landholder I know to produce more food than they did in the past.

There have undoubtedly been some difficulties especially in the early days. Some of the gas companies and their contractors have engaged in conduct that should never be repeated but thankfully those incidents have been in the minority.

The State Government has been slow to act to change some of the outdated legislation but with the constant urging of the LNP Opposition they are finally catching up and the Parliament has passed a range of new legislation including new land access laws and new requirements for mandatory conduct and compensation agreements.

Last week in the Parliament a Bill was passed to manage the underground water issue and protect the bores of landholders and other existing water users. During the debate I moved 14 amendments to the Government's Bill to try to strengthen those protections for landholders. The Minister could make no argument against five of our amendments and we will continue to pursue the other issues.

In particular we will continue to propose that a new statutory authority be appointed by the Parliament called the Gasfields Land and Water Authority to oversee the new laws.

The Labor Government has given that role to the Queensland Water Commission based in Brisbane and I will continue to argue that there should be a new authority of which local landholder and local Government leaders can be part to fulfil this critical oversight role.

The LNP has a policy for the management of the new industry and our policy will continue to grow and address new issues as the industry grows. We will continue to pursue change in the regulations when the need is identified and we are constantly seeking suggestions about what changes are necessary.

I gave a solid commitment in the Parliament last week that in Government we would amend whatever legislation we need to take whatever action was required at the first verifiable case of landholders rights being lost or water pollution or land degradation occurring.

We have long recognised that there are a range of issues such as land access, water extraction and regional infrastructure that have to be dealt with properly and some of them are difficult and complex.

The reality however is that dealing with those often complex issues is only made harder by the current atmosphere of anxiety and fear.

There is no doubt that the CSG industry presents rural Queenslanders with a huge challenge. The greatest challenge will be ensuring that the people who are impacted the most - rural and regional Queenslanders - are able to get our fair share of the huge economic benefit that will flow to the State from this new industry.

To achieve that we have to maintain a creditable voice and a creditable position. We should never allow ourselves to be used by the serial environmental alarmists in their quest to rid the world of fossil fuels nor should we become trapped in the mind numbing world of the conspiracy theorists.

Our community leaders – including me – need to be honest and up front with people and not try to mis-represent what the real issues are for our landholders and our communities.

We need to clearly and creditably define what those issues are and then we have to find solutions to those issues or be able to prevent them from developing if no solutions are possible. Once again anxiety and fear do not help in that process

I am confident that the people of regional Queensland, the landholders and the local Government leaders especially are smart enough and resourceful enough to take on this challenge and make the lives of the next generation of regional Queenslanders better because of the opportunities it presents.