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Dear Deputy Premier,

The letters you have sent to community members in response to their concerns about the devastating impacts of coal seam gas exploration and mining in Gippsland might at first glance appear to be placating and laudable, but with further scrutiny they are nothing more than a thin veneer covering the deeper and less palatable truths.

Your comments beg a multitude of questions, but first, a preamble.

As you know, the Victorian Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990 and the Mineral Resources Development Regulations 2002 provide a legal framework to ensure mineral resources are developed in ways that minimise adverse impacts on the environment and the community.

These laws stipulate that the health and safety of people is protected in relation to mining work being done under a license.

The Act was amended in 2006 to include the concept of sustainable development, which is defined (in part) as follows:

1. Community wellbeing and welfare should be enhanced by following a path of economic development that safeguards the welfare of future generations
2. There should be equity within and between generations
3. Biological diversity should be protected and ecological integrity maintained
4. Both long and short-term economic, environmental, social and equity considerations should be effectively integrated into decision-making
5. If there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage, lack of a full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation; decision-making should be guided by careful evaluation to avoid serious or irreversible damage to the environment wherever practicable, and by assessment of the risk-weighted consequences of various options
6. Development should make a positive contribution to regional development and respect the aspirations of the community and Indigenous peoples; decisions and actions should provide for community involvement in issues that affect them.

It is clear from the experience of communities in Qld, NSW and the USA that coal seam gas mining not only does not support the achievement of any of these outcomes, it completely undermines it. Why then is the government entertaining the prospect of coal seam gas mining in Victoria?

We expect our government to work within the framework of the law and protect the inter-generational social, environmental and economic wellbeing of the communities you represent.

Importantly, it is incumbent on government to observe the precautionary principle to which it has subscribed, and **STOP** all activity until we have confidence about the safety of mining coal seam gas.

You have stated that “there is almost certainly no need for ‘fracking’ in Victoria” because of the moisture content of brown coal. This is good. Our question then is if fracking is not needed, why not just **ban** it, to ensure that we never, ever have to face the risks associated with this dangerous process, and in so doing, support the precautionary principal expressed above?

Our further questions in response to your statements include:

1. Could you please explain in what ways are Victorian exploration and mining license conditions tougher than in other states?
2. How does the Victorian government plan to hold the mining companies to account, when the industry watchdog, the Department of Primary Industries is reported to have recently lost 25% of its staff?
3. How many CSG wells is government prepared to approve? 10? 100? 1,000? 10,000? More?
  - How much land will be consumed by drilling? What density of wells per hectare is acceptable to government?
4. What infrastructure will be required to support the wells?
  - Roads? Rail? Processing plants? Compressor stations? Pipelines?
  - How much land will it cover?
5. What carcinogens and neurotoxins will be released from the coal seam gas mining process?
  - What are the health standard limits for each chemical used in or released by the process?
  - How will government ensure that their release into the air, soil or water is held within legal health standard limits?
6. How much methane released into the atmosphere is acceptable?
  - How will it affect our nation’s pledge to reduce CO<sup>2</sup> emissions by 2020?
7. What proportion of the gas will be used domestically and what proportion will be exported?

- Which port will the gas be exported from?
  - What infrastructure will be required?
  - What environmental impacts will occur? Fisheries? Air? Noise? Land degradation?
8. The Victorian government has killed the renewable energy industry in this state by stipulating that a wind tower must be no closer than 2km from a residence. Why then is this government allowing coal seam gas rigs to be located as close as 100 metres to a home?
  9. What contingency plans does the government have to manage potentially catastrophic events, such as bush fires igniting coal seam gas wells and floods washing toxic waste onto land and into waterways?
  10. By how much does the government expect South Gippsland properties to be devalued as a result of coal seam gas mining?
    - What impact will this have on local council's ability to raise rateable income from devalued properties?
  11. How much royalty revenue is government expecting to receive from CSG in Gippsland?
  12. How much in donations has this government received from the mining lobby?
  13. If mining goes ahead, will government commit to conducting health and environmental impact studies that are INDEPENDENT of the mining companies?
  14. What regulations will apply to the safe management of the toxic, saline, 'produced water' that comes up with the gas? Who will monitor?
  15. What will be done with the mountains of toxic salt – and how much salt is acceptable and how much too much?
  16. How will the toxic 'produced water' be prevented from evaporating, and coming back down to the land and into our food chain in rainfall?
  17. How will government ensure that gas contaminated water does not leach from the holding ponds into the water tables and water ways?
  18. How will government ensure that a gas blow out does not occur as it did in Dalby, Qld in May 2011, where an Arrow Energy gas well spewed methane and water up to 90 metres high for more than a day? (The 4<sup>th</sup> incident in recent years on one property!)
  19. If Fracking does occur in South Gippsland – and if it doesn't - how much water will the government permit the mining companies to use?
    - Where will it come from?
    - Who will monitor it?

- How will government protect the farmers' access to water in future years?
20. How many thousands of truckloads will be required to deliver the water, sand and chemicals to the mining sites?
- How much of taxpayers' money will be spent in maintaining the already crumbling roads?
  - Who will pay for the extra wear and tear?
  - How will this additional traffic contribute to/detract from our carbon reduction targets?
  - And how will this extra heavy vehicle traffic affect the local communities it drives through?
21. How many local jobs does government expected to be created, or will the mining companies bring in their own fly-in fly-out workforce?
22. What additional health consequences (e.g., respiratory disease, cancer, skin conditions, mental illness, etc.) are anticipated as a result of increased mining activity?
- How much additional funding will Federal and State governments need to allocate to healthcare budgets to cover the additional burden of disease resulting from mining activities?
23. How much productive farmland will be lost to mining?
- What is the estimated loss of food production capacity?
  - What degree of loss does government consider acceptable?

Having answers to these questions will enable us, and the broader community, to determine our future position on this issue. We therefore look forward to your answers to these questions at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,

Larry & Linda Giddy