

Gas rumblings shake the hill

Community concerns ignite parliamentary debate.

AAP/ONE



NOT SEAMLESS: Gas mining splits communities

MPs on all sides of parliament have added their voices to community concerns over the multi-billion dollar coal seam gas industry, with one member of the House of Representatives seeking to boost Commonwealth powers to block any projects which threaten water supplies.

A vocal stoush has developed in recent months between miners and farmers in the coal rich basins of New South Wales and Queensland which have seen an explosion in coal seam gas exploration over the past decade.

Some landowners are angry about being unable to stop exploration on their properties amid concerns coal seam gas mining threatens water resources and food security.

Independent Member for New England (NSW) Tony Windsor has introduced an amendment to the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, which would require companies to notify the Commonwealth if they think a new project will impact on water resources. It would also enable the federal government to intervene and veto projects if it thinks water resources are threatened.

Natural resources belong to states, which are responsible for granting mining royalties and setting regulations. However some major projects need to be approved by the Commonwealth under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act if they are deemed to be environmentally significant.

Speaking in the House of Representatives, Mr Windsor said state laws have not kept up with environmental pressures new developments could pose.

“There is a need for a nationally consistent standard to allow certainty for gas and coal companies at the same time as protecting Australia’s limited water resources,” he said.

LATEST

BABY ALCOHOL DISORDERS INVESTIGATED

The prevalence of foetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) in Australian communities is being investigated by a parliamentary inquiry.

FASD is the term used to describe a range of cognitive, physical, mental and behavioural disorders that result from a baby’s exposure to alcohol when it is still in the womb.

The House of Representatives Social Policy and Legal Affairs Committee will look at what sorts of intervention measures and prevention strategies can be used to combat FASD. It will also examine ways to better manage the issue through access to appropriate care and support services.

A recent inquiry into Indigenous youth and the justice system concluded that FASD was an emerging health problem across Australia and urged the federal government to recognise

FASD as a registered disability. It also proposed a further specific review into the issue.

Several MPs spoke in the House recently in support of a motion calling for more government action to reduce the rates of FASD.

Graham Perrett (Moreton, Qld), chair of the Social Policy and Legal Affairs Committee, told the House around 2.7 babies in every 1,000 will suffer from FASD.

“Babies born with foetal alcohol syndrome face a range of difficulties later in life including lower IQ, developmental delays, behaviour problems, learning difficulties, memory problems ... and increased risk of alcohol and drug misuse,” he said. •

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www.aph.gov.au/spla
spla.reps@aph.gov.au
 (02) 6277 2358