

The Editor

Northern Daily Leader

Dear Sir, Your readers by now would be well aware Santos removed some of their misleading advertisements that were shown on electronic media, but may not know of the ongoing similar deception practiced by Santos in print media as well.

Recently Santos Manager of Community and Government Relations, Sam Crafter , wrote in glowing terms of the Santos promotion of the yet to be completed Namoi Catchment Water Study into the effects of Coal and Coal Seam Gas extraction. Mr Crafter on behalf of Santos would have readers believe that the Study as it stands is complete; “catchment wide”, “thorough” and includes “the more extreme hypothetical scenarios”.

The Study is not complete. It does not include the approved modelling of the accelerated Scenario 7 (otherwise known as the Hunter Valley option!) and since it has yet to be peer reviewed it would be irresponsible and misleading to suggest otherwise.

The Study is a remarkable achievement in that it is the first study to be attempted on such a scale. However, it didn't cover all the catchment, and there are significant gaps in the Study, hence we consider it essential Namoi CMA are required to continue the work collating all new research data to be provided by coal and CSG companies before any new projects are given the go ahead.

The reality is that the Namoi Catchment Water Study only models a fraction of the Namoi Catchment and is far from “thorough” with no modelling of key issues that are called for in its Terms of Reference such as effects on water quality and surface flows. There is also no attempt to model the effects on natural springs, so critical to the community throughout the Namoi Catchment.

As of Monday last week (12th November) the Model Mr Crafter refers to as Scenario 7 has not even been released and it shows a clear lack of credibility by Santos to allow him to say “Even in the more extreme hypothetical scenarios CSG impacts are still minimal and less than the background water use”. Santos may care to explain how they have that information?

Santos has been held up to the agricultural industry as a highly professional gas company, responsible, compliant with best practice and willing to engage with farmers honestly. Unfortunately the evidence is building that shows Santos is failing to meet these standards.

Earlier this year Santos released an economic report stating “a once in a lifetime economic benefit” would result from developing Coal Seam Gas in the Namoi. The Australia Institute reviewed this report and found it fails as a proper economic assessment revealing the benefits to the local economy would be quite small.

Santos also announced a landholder compensation scheme promising much largesse for farmers, \$150 million over 10 years. An analysis of these figures suggest the actual compensation of \$3000 per well pad to be no match for the negative impacts that result from coal seam gas impacts on water and soil resources. The resulting devaluation of the property and neighbouring properties was excluded.

Further to this Santos also claimed the majority of environmental damage done in the Pilliga area was the responsibility of Eastern Star Gas, yet as a 35% shareholder in ESG and as a major parent company involved in gas production this flimsy flick pass is unacceptable to even the most naive. Santos has been fined for environmental contamination incidents in the Pilliga from their own operations post Eastern Star Gas.

Last, but not least, the latest advertising campaign promoting that Santos does and can co-exist with Agriculture in our region has taken a major blow as the spin was revealed. The farmer is not really a farmer from the Liverpool plains, he doesn't grow Canola or Cotton, nor can Santos be attributed with finding water for Goran Lake!

The future of the Namoi Catchment and the security of its water resources faces many uncertainties. There is a lot of work to be done regarding the development of Coal and Coal Seam Gas in our valley and it will require a foundation of rigorous science, frank and honest discussions, respect and above all, a co-operative environment amongst all stakeholders, if these industries are to proceed in Australia's most productive food producing region.

Yours faithfully,

Hugh Price

Chairman - Namoi Community Network

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