

MEDIA RELEASE

James Harker-Mortlock – Independent Candidate for Hume – Coal Seam Gas

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COAL SEAM GAS – SUPPORT FOR POSSIBLE FEDERAL INTERVENTION

I refer to the possibility of the Federal Government adjusting the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act to be able to use the issue of the health of our precious water resources to trigger Commonwealth involvement in the activities of the coal seam gas industry. Given the apparent unwillingness of the New South Wales Government to participate with the Federal Government and other States in scientific research into the impacts of coal seam gas exploration and mining on the environment, despite such research being fully funded by the Commonwealth, I support such a move by the Federal Government.

Having been involved in making detailed submissions to the New South Wales government in regard to the protection of strategic agricultural lands and water aquifers, I am well aware that there is no effective regulatory framework in New South Wales to protect our environment from the potential impacts of coal seam gas exploration and mining, no matter what some New South Wales Ministers might claim.

The New South Wales Government's Strategic Agricultural Lands Policy and its Aquifer Interference Policy are both only that – policy documents. They are merely guidelines, they do not have the force of legislation. After being emasculated by the Liberal Party, they are also much weaker documents than those originally envisaged. I have spoken to lawyers involved in representing farmers and others opposed to coal seam gas exploration on their properties and it appears that the courts are interested in legislation, not mere policy documents. Policy documents can and do change at the whim of a party or a Minister. People deserve to be protected by way of legislation, not to be subjected to the ever changing winds of political expediency.

However, there is something much more fundamental at play here. It is the democratic right of the people to say 'no' to something they do not want. Politicians are increasingly developing an unacceptable habit of telling people what to do, not responding to what people want. Power in a democracy arises from the people, it does not arise from the increasingly disconnected political class, bureaucracies or corporations. It appears that the majority of the people do not want coal seam gas exploration and mining. It is time that politicians listened to and took their instruction from those who elect them. This applies particularly to some Liberal Ministers in the New South Wales State Government.

For more information :

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