

WOLLOMBI VALLEY AGAINST GAS EXTRACTION

WAGE

MEDIA RELEASE

We wish to bring your attention to the fact that a consortium of **Sydney Gas Limited** and **AGL Energy** hold Petroleum Exploration Licences to explore for *Coal Seam Methane Gas* across a significant area of the Sydney Basin including the Wollombi Valley.

Listed by the National Trust in 1977 as a landscape conservation area, the Wollombi Valley lays just north of Sydney at the southern end of the Lower Hunter Valley. Consisting of farming land set in narrow river valleys between Yengo National Park and the Watagan Mountains, the Wollombi Valley is home to all manner of native flora and fauna. The name Wollombi is an aboriginal word meaning 'The Meeting Place of the Waters' as there are many local tributaries feeding the Wollombi Brook. The associated aquifers are a critical source of water for the local population.

Reached via the convict-built Old Great North Road, the two local villages of Wollombi and Laguna retain important heritage value.

Some of the local families have been here since the earliest days of the Colony. Tourists coming through the valley in significant numbers to relax and enjoy its beauty are critical to the feasibility of most local businesses.

Sydney Gas have confirmed to us that if they find a coal seam methane gas field here in the Wollombi Valley and it were to prove economic for production, they anticipate there would eventually be installed as many as 200 well heads as well as a very large compressor station together with all the associated pipelines. Large amounts of water would be removed by road tanker from each wellhead, possibly involving hundreds of such vehicle movements each week.

Coal Seam Methane (CSM) extraction presents significant risks to this environment. It is well documented that CSM operations have caused catastrophic damage to the environment and watercourses both here in Australia and overseas. The infrastructure and heavy traffic movements associated with methane gas extraction would cause irreparable damage to the character and environment of the Wollombi Valley, the fabric of its community and cultural history.

In relation to Sydney Gas drilling in the Wollombi Valley, the **Total Environment Centre** says:

The Wollombi Valley is an inappropriate location for CSM extraction and therefore exploration. There are significant concerns over the dewatering of the aquifer and its potential to deplete groundwater levels. We are also concerned that the removed water is toxic and presents a threat to the Wollombi Brook system. The issue of what to do with the water is problematic as leaving it in holding ponds that could burst or overflow is unacceptable, while the option of transporting it away from the valley with numerous truck movements presents both environmental and safety hazards.

TEC would also like to see the matter of historical flood levels compared with the location of drilling rigs fully investigated. No native vegetation should be cleared to make way for surface infrastructure if exploration progresses to full extraction. The proponent must also rule out the use of holding ponds in the Wollombi Valley at either the exploration stage or extraction stage should this occur. The Onshore Petroleum Act 1991 should also be amended to require vigorous environmental assessment for exploration projects.

We have contacted a wide range of experts and politicians to speak at a Public Information Meeting, including **Peter Garrett** who used to own property in the area - and whose portfolio of *Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts* perfectly aligns with the issues in the Wollombi Valley. Mr Garrett hasn't yet responded.

Please accept our invitation send someone to cover the Public Information Meeting at **Laguna Hall** from 10.00am on Saturday the 9th August 2008.

For further details and updates to the speakers list, please see **www.wage.org.au**

Speakers so far include:

- **Lee Rhiannon MLC** - NSW Parliament
- **Josie Walker** - Environmental Defenders Office
- **Mike Atkinson** - Geologist & Mine Engineer
- **Cr. Alison Davey** - Cessnock City Council
- **John Harvey** - Quorrobolong Community Council
- **Cr. James Ryan** - Cessnock City Council
- **Rev. Graham Jackson** – Anglican Church
- **Bob Kennedy** - Hunter-Bulga Gas Action Group (TBC)

Further background information can be found in the news section of the WAGE website.

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