



AGL PLANS TO MINE COAL SEAM GAS IN THE SCENIC HILLS & SUBURBS OF CAMPBELLTOWN & CAMDEN

The Camden Gas Project

AGL Energy Limited (AGL) with Sydney Gas (now absorbed into AGL) has been extracting coal seam gas (CSG) in the Macarthur region for about ten years via the Camden Gas Project (CGP), where 85% of wells have been 'fraced'¹. Up to now this has affected mainly rural areas where concerned landowners have been powerless to stop it.

In 2010 AGL applied to the NSW Minister for Planning to expand its operations northwards into Sydney (*Stage 3, Northern Expansion*) – this time into the Scenic Hills Environmental Protection area adjoining suburbs of Campbelltown and Camden in the Sydney Metropolitan Area. Local planning² prohibits *extractive industries* and *mines* in this area, but AGL seeks to avoid this by dubiously claiming its project is a *public utility undertaking*.

The proposal is an enormous conflict of land use planning on Sydney's urban fringe, violating the zoning of the South West's much loved Scenic Hills, endangering our heritage and industrialising land used for schools, churches, monasteries, recreational facilities, and people's homes.

The Stage 3 application has not yet been decided.

Proposal for Stage 3 of the CGP

AGL plans to install up to 72 gas extraction wells with connecting infrastructure - gas pipelines, access roads, central water storage points, storage yards and possibly infield compression - in the Scenic Hills and on land recently rezoned for new housing in Camden. The project features horizontal wells that will run for 2.5 km underground from the well heads, drawing gas from seams running under more than 26 suburbs, including: Blair Athol, Blairmount, Bow Bowing, Bradbury, Camden, Campbelltown, Catherine Field, Claymore, Currans Hill, Denham Court, Eagle Vale, Elderslie, Eschol Park, Glen Alpine, Harrington Park, Ingleburn, Kearns, Kirkham, Macquarie Links, Mount Annan, Narellan Vale, Raby, Rosemeadow, St Andrews, Varroville, Woodbine.

¹NSW Upper House Inquiry 2011. 'Fracking' is a process used in unconventional (shale & CSG) gas extraction to release methane gas from the coal or shale seam. The seam is fractured by pumping water, sand and chemicals into the seam under pressure. It is implicated in chemical contamination, depletion of ground and surface water, and earthquake tremors, raising concerns for farming, environmental safety and health.

² Campbelltown Local Environment Plan–District 8 (Central Hills Lands).

AGL plans to run its main gas gathering spine line along Sydney's back-up water supply canal (the Upper Canal, classified as *critical public infrastructure*) and through the Australian Botanic Garden at Mount Annan - the Australian native plant garden of the Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney.

AGL initially applied to put a *gas treatment plant* into the Hills as part of Stage 3. The Minister vetoed the gas plant in 2010 after local protest which included a petition of more than 1000 names raised by the Scenic Hills Association (SHA) and a local newspaper. AGL then made a new application with plans to pipe the gas back to its Rosalind Park Gas Plant at Menangle instead, **even though it had originally claimed it could not do this**. The Department of Planning accepted the application knowing the project was not fully specified. This raises concerns that AGL may later seek a modification to reinstate its gas treatment plant once the Stage 3 wells have been drilled.

AGL plans to use existing suburban streets and roads to access a number of its sites which includes the transportation of industrial machinery (rigs), chemicals and contaminated waste water associated with drilling and its hydraulic fracturing ('fracking') operations.

Expert Warnings on CSG mining in Australia

In December 2010, the National Water Commission (NWC) issued a statement warning that the "potential impacts of CSG developments, particularly the cumulative effects of multiple projects are not well understood", noting problems associated with 'fracking', waste water management, water extraction and land subsidence, and "significant social impacts" caused by the disruptive nature of infrastructure construction and access. Similar concerns have been raised overseas.

In April 2011, the National Toxics Network (NTN) called for a moratorium on drilling and 'fracking' chemicals until all chemicals have been fully assessed by the industrial chemicals regulator.

Doctors for the Environment, Australia (DEA) has called for a Health Impact Study to investigate the potential ill health caused by all facets of the industry's operations.

Research into the life-time impact of shale and coal seam gas **production** on greenhouse gas emissions is raising the possibility that CSG may not be the 'clean' alternative to coal that the industry claims, and may lead to a similar increase in global warming. (David Shearman, DEA, ABC Online, April 11, 2011).

SHA Objects

In January 2011, after careful evaluation of AGL's Stage 3 Environmental Assessment (EA), SHA lodged an **objection** with the NSW Department of Planning and has made further submissions to the NSW Upper House Inquiry –coal seam gas (report due in May 2012). Our key concerns are:

- AGL's proposal is 'industrialising' the Scenic Hills, violating the zoning and threatening its survival.
- New residential release areas in Camden will have operating gas wells dangerously close to housing (possibly within 20 metres).
- AGL plans to put wells **on** 'sensitive' land (used by churches, schools, monasteries etc.) even though the landowners say it conflicts with their use of the land and have refused permission.
- Rare and endangered woodland, wildlife, and cultural heritage in the Hills may be destroyed by clearing for pipeline and well construction, by subsidence, or by water and soil pollution –risking Cumberland Plain Woodland, the botanic garden, aboriginal 'places', the 1880s listed Upper Canal and historic landscapes and farms that shaped the beginnings of the pastoral industry in NSW.
- Sydney's Upper Canal drinking water is at risk.
- Property values may suffer (Senate Inquiry 2011).
- AGL has not conducted scientifically-valid ground water monitoring in prior stages of the CGP, potentially in breach of its Petroleum Production Leases. The NSW Government is carelessly putting the public at risk in allowing this, and in continuing to approve successive modifications and expansion of the CGP without knowing what damage may have already been done by AGL's existing processes and approach.
- Since the gas mining companies are effectively allowed to self-monitor and self-report in NSW, the public cannot be sure that project 'conditions of approval' and safety standards are being met.
- The EA contains critical errors and omissions, making it misleading to the public and to those charged with deciding its outcome:
 - The EA dismisses any impact on agricultural land use in Campbelltown's Scenic Hills by wrongly assuming that the land will be rezoned for urban development rather than set aside for urban agriculture.
 - The EA assumes there are no 'below ground' risks. Expert opinion (e.g. NWC) disagrees.

- The EA relies heavily on desk research. AGL expects to carry out key site-specific studies only **after** approval of its project. This avoids public scrutiny of documents that should be part of the project decision.
- Key elements of the project have not yet been specified. The community cannot comment on an incomplete application.
- With so many 'unknowns', AGL's proposal is using the Scenic Hills and its surrounding suburbs as '**guinea pigs**' for future CSG development – but at what cost to people living in Sydney's South West? ...to Sydney's water supply?

If the Minister approves this project, we fear it will spell the end of the Scenic Hills as we know them and bring to South West Sydney many of the environmental, health, social and economic problems and risks affecting communities elsewhere in NSW & Queensland.

HELP US PROTECT OUR SCENIC HILLS & HOMES:

1. Become a Friend of SHA (www.scenic hills.org.au) and join in our action.
2. Put a sign on your gate opposing CSG in the Macarthur area and its Scenic Hills. (Make your own or buy one from SHA for \$10).
3. Email the **NSW Minister for Planning**, the Hon. Brad Hazzard at office@hazzard.minister.nsw.gov.au ,
4. Write to, or email **local MPs** and/or **Councils**:
 - **Camden Electorate**: Chris Patterson MP, P.O. Box 669, Camden 2570, **ph. 46553333**. camden@parliament.nsw.gov.au
 - **Macquarie Fields Electorate**: Dr Andrew McDonald MP, Shop 18 Carnes Hill Marketplace, Cowpasture Rd, Horningsea Park 2171, **ph. 96088991**. macquariefields@parliament.nsw.gov.au
 - **Campbelltown Electorate**: Bryan Doyle MP, P.O. Box 895, Campbelltown, 2560, **ph. 46253344**. campbelltown@parliament.nsw.gov.au
 - **Campbelltown City Council**: Paul Tosi, General Manager, P.O. Box CAMPBELLTOWN 2560, **ph. 46454000**. council@campbelltown.nsw.gov.au
 - **Camden Council**: Greg Wright, General Manager, PO Box 183, Camden 2570, **ph. 4654 7822**. mail@camden.nsw.gov.au