

**Speech to Initial Meeting of  
Richmond Valley Group Against Gas**

**November 2011**

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My wife Susan and I farm a property in Kyogle and I have worked for 35 years as a clinical psychologist specialising in the treatment of trauma.

The coal seam gas industry is a profoundly dangerous and sinister threat to country people and the land they love. Australia is entering a time of great personal, social and political strife. Opinions are becoming polarised.

Resources Minister Martin Ferguson said that it is un-Australian to suggest that farmers should be able to control access by miners to their properties.

For others, it is un-Australian and traitorous to turn our best agricultural land into gas fields to power the military-industrial complex of communist China.

Our national anthem has something to say about what it is to be Australian.

*'Australians all let us rejoice, for we are young and free.'*

Ours is a young nation, built on ancient foundations. Our aboriginal brothers and sisters arrived first, some 60,000 years ago. It took longer for the rest of us to get here, but we are home now.

It doesn't matter how long you have been here, if you love and care for this land, then you are Australian.

But it is becoming harder to rejoice, because we are no longer free. We are not convicts, controlled by gaolers. No dictator tells us what to do. We are meant to be free to rule ourselves, but our democracy has been corrupted.

We no longer have 'government of the people, by the people, for the people'. We now have 'government of the people, by a few, for a few'.

Mining companies have bought an army of Labor, Liberal, and National ex-politicians and public servants, to influence governments as so-called 'lobbyists' on their behalf.

Profiting from public service in this way might be legal, but it has led to disastrous policy and undermined the rule of law.

Laws that protect landowners and the environment have been thrown out the window. Miners do whatever they want, wherever they want. Rural communities are being destroyed for the illegitimate profit of a rich and powerful few.

*'We've golden soil and wealth for toil.'*

We Australians are blessed. Our soil is like gold. With work, our country can produce perpetual wealth; growing good, healthy food, for ever. For most of humankind, our water would be priceless.

Farmers manage their land so that it could support them and feed this country and the rest of the world for centuries to come. Casino is called the ‘beef capital’ for good reasons. Casino produces top quality beef, a commodity that will become increasingly valuable in the future.

And now CSG mining threatens to end an industry that supports thousands of people in Casino.

Soil, water and air are Earth’s great life support systems. But now a greedy, lazy few want to destroy our water and soil for easy profit.

No sweat or toil for them as they sit in their air-conditioned offices and their machines punch through our soil and aquifers to inject the earth with toxic chemicals. We are just obstacles in the way of their getting to the gas.

*‘Our home is girt by sea.’*

Australia is an island. Everything that we do not produce for ourselves has to arrive from somewhere else by ship or plane.

We have great agricultural industries, and have always been self-sufficient in food, but that is rapidly coming to an end.

Farming country has been lost as cities grow and climate changes. And now coal seam gas is destroying our best agricultural lands.

Australian produce is amongst the world's cleanest and best, but we are becoming dependent on imported food which brings with it poisons from where it was grown.

Wealth and security from being self-sufficient in food, is being replaced by a culture that values only cheap imported goods.

*‘Our land abounds in nature’s gifts, of beauty rich and rare.’*

These wonderful words remind us of something that we all know to be true. How can anyone ever forget the wonderful bounty of gifts that we Australians enjoy? Our land is beautiful, rich and rare, and it has to be protected for all time.

*‘In histories page, let every stage, Advance Australia Fair!’*

We are at a turning point in history. The CSG assault on rural Australia is the most extreme, radical experiment in social and environmental engineering this country has ever seen.

Choices we make now will determine whether our children inherit a rich and beautiful Casino, or a polluted, industrialised gas field.

Our anthem calls on us to make sure that this stage in our history advances Australia fair.

So, what is happening here, and what does the future hold for us?

CSG mining has already destroyed rural communities from the Darling Downs to the Liverpool Plains, and now it is in Casino and the Northern Rivers.

We are still in the early 'exploration' stage of the attack. CSG companies have induced landowners to sign secret, binding agreements to allow gas exploration on their properties.

Some farmers say that they are happy enough with Metgasco. After all, they are being paid, the well is no problem to them, and they are reassured by soothing statements and slick advertising.

The real problems will come when the coal seam gas industry ramps up into full scale production.

Metgasco will likely be long gone after selling out to a multinational petroleum company, and guarantees given by Metgasco won't be worth the paper they are written on.

If Metgasco manages to construct a pipeline across the Border Ranges to Queensland where gas will be shipped to communist China, then all of the Northern Rivers will be opened up to full-scale CSG mining.

As thousands of wells appear across the country, people will realise that the CSG advertisements were all lies.

It's hard to sell something as filthy and as ugly as the CSG industry. All they can do is try to con people by calling coal seam gas 'natural'. It's natural all right, natural like cancer and death.

People will wonder what happened to the 'second industry' that the unnamed Casino school teacher wanted. There is no 'new industry'.

Sure, more hamburgers and beer will be sold while the fly-in construction workers build wells, but they will soon go and leave behind devastated farming and tourist operations, and no real new jobs.

Coal seam gas mining can not exist together with agriculture and tourism. It is a choice of one or the other; a rural versus an industrial lifestyle.

It starts with one 'exploratory' well, but ends as a spider's web of pipes, wells and toxic ponds across your property.

When you give access to the CSG miners, you sign away forever your right to control what happens on your property.

You have also seriously compromised everyone who lives near you, because your neighbours' properties will be put into a buffer zone and used by the gas companies.

Every landowner in Casino and the Northern Rivers faces the prospect of a gas company being able to legally force entry onto their property to build roads, establish camps, drill bores that punch through aquifers, dig dams to hold contaminated salty water, and set up noisy, brightly lit wells and pumping stations that will run 24 hours a day for the next 30 years.

Some people will make a fortune extracting gas from the earth, but that does not make this a good idea. The community will pay a huge price for the wealth the miners and government take.

We live on a good creek, but during the last drought we had to rely on a bore for water.

At the end of our valley there are two World Heritage rainforests. If you follow the creeks to the tops of the ranges you will find where the water comes out of the ground. Aquifer-fed springs have sustained these rainforests for millions of years. And now thousands of CSG wells are planned for our area.

If certain aquifers are damaged, then these rainforests will be destroyed, and our farm's ability to survive droughts will be compromised.

When someone allows CSG mining onto their property, the value of all the land in the area declines.

In Queensland, families have had to just walk away from their farms because CSG mining made their land worthless and the drilling destroyed their bore water.

The value that farming families add to their properties during their lifetimes is often their only superannuation and legacy for their children.

The decline in land values caused by CSG mining is a massive, cruel transfer of superannuation wealth from farming families to mining companies.

CSG is not profitable if you take into account the wealth taken from farming families.

As a rural area is industrialised, the psychological impact of widespread destruction of property, lifestyle and prospects results in predictable emotional responses.

Many suffer anxiety, breakdown and depression. Some suicide. But some respond with anger and violence.

Fear and anxiety are normal, healthy emotions. Anxiety alerts us to the presence of a threat, and fear and anger give us the drive to respond to danger.

Distressing thoughts, images and dreams, feeling irritable, having trouble sleeping, not enjoying life as you used to, problems with memory and concentration; these are all normal reactions that go with preparing to fight danger.

Our built-in survival mechanisms work well when we need to fight off a wild animal, but they are less effective when the danger is caused by distant politicians that you can't get your hands on.

Many people have used their anxiety and anger well, and have devoted enormous amounts of energy to fighting CSG mining.

If these efforts result in the danger being removed, then all will be well, and people will be able to let go of the anger because it has done its job.

But if these efforts fail to remove the threat, then the anxiety and anger will persist. Anger turned inward leads to depression. Anger turned outward leads to violence.

Sadly, anger that cannot be directed at the true source of the danger, it can be directed to innocent people, including the people who are closest to us.

A woman from Tara, Queensland, told me that she had visited a farmer friend to find him curled up on the floor, crying. He was being driven mad because he could not escape the noise of a nearby gas compression station. He could not sell his land. He could not afford to move away.

We cannot allow such things to happen here.

I want to say a few things about the stress that comes during a long and difficult campaign.

We are in a fight, our enemy would like nothing better than for us to become depressed and burnt out so that we give up.

Depression is like a flat battery. If we feel stressed and think about disturbing things too much of the time so that it affects our sleep, then we become worn out.

It's important that we support and keep contact with members within our groups. All of us are going to have bad days, and sometimes all that is needed is to talk to someone who understands. The danger lies in isolation.

Country people do not suffer higher rates of anxiety and depression than city people, but they do have higher rates of suicide. This is because it is easier to drop out and become isolated in the bush.

We need to support each other and keep an eye out to make sure that friends do not just slip away because they become depressed.

As we meet here tonight, farmers on the Liverpool Plains, west of Armidale, are blockading to stop a CSG well that threatens their aquifers. These farmers have said that they will do whatever it takes, for as long as it takes, to protect their country.

History tells us that sometimes governments come to their senses, and make decisions that restore the rule of law and bring peace to the community.

But at other times, government policy is only changed by the determined action of people, like the Liverpool Plains farmers, who make a stand and say, 'No'.

Nowadays no one regrets that Fraser Island was saved from sand mining. Looking back from the future, no one is going to regret that Casino and the Northern Rivers were not turned into a gas field.

The strength of the CSG industry is its massive wealth and political power. Its weakness is that it is on the wrong side. It pursues greed at a terrible cost to Australia.

Opponents of the CSG industry do not have great wealth, but we are on the right side of this issue. We accept our responsibility as custodians of the land. We want to pass on the right legacy to future generations.

We know that clean water, good soil, and healthy rural communities are going to be the most precious commodities on the planet, bar none, in coming decades.

If we save Casino and the Northern Rivers from coal seam gas mining, this area will become one of the most valuable and productive agricultural regions in the world.

We have everything to gain by resisting the coal seam gas monster, and everything to lose if we allow it to destroy our country.

Land owners in other areas have been able to turn the coal seam gas miners away because they all agreed to 'lock the gate'.

Casino and the Northern Rivers can be saved if we all refuse to sign access agreements with gas companies and we all agree to 'Lock the Gate'.

Together we stand, divided we fall. Don't sign anything. Don't let them in.

For the sake of our families, our country, and our future, we will force CSG mining out of Casino and the Northern Rivers.

Thank you.