



EDO Qld.

Environmental Defenders Office

*Using the law to protect
our environment.*

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MEDIA RELEASE

MINISTERS AVOID COAL SEAM GAS TRANSPARENCY REFORM CALL

Last week the Premier and key Ministers received a detailed letter¹ calling for reforms to the fairness and transparency of the assessment process relating to environmental authorities for coal seam gas and mining.

But the Premier and Ministers have not provided a response and Minister Hinchliffe's response misses the point.

Ms Jo Bragg, Principal Solicitor of Environmental Defenders Office Queensland said,

"I have received expressions of support for our reform proposals from rural people affected by mining and from city based organisations deeply concerned about lack of transparency. The State government provides no legal aid to landholders or anyone else wanting to scrutinise assessment of coal seam gas and mining projects or indeed for any public interest environmental cases. EDO recommended new allocations of State Legal Aid in 2010 to meet unmet demand and was told no². If you lodge an application with Legal Aid Queensland for help with a legal Court challenge on environmental matters the answer is a clear no, irrespective of the public interest in protecting groundwater, health, vegetation or cropping land.

This is simply undemocratic- given the resources of mining and gas companies.

The State government has also repeatedly refused to increase the resources of Environmental Defenders Office Queensland a respected independent non-profit community legal centre so we can address the demand from rural clients³. Yet the demand is ever increasing with over 20 coal mines under assessment in Queensland right now and rural clients ringing for help.

Minister Hinchliffe is apparently confused and referring to reforms on land access disputes. Legal Aid Queensland does give very limited help on this. He is avoiding our key points – that landholders are missing out on crucial notification of submission or objection rights on coal seam gas and coal mining proposals. It's the environmental authorities under the *Environmental Protection Act* 1994 that contain the crucial conditions to protect ground water and environmental values. And if landholders miss out then they lose rights to go to the Land Court to have the issue debated in open Court.

Where is the response to this important democratic issue from the Premier, the Attorney-General or the Environment Minister?

¹ The letter to the Premier and Ministers see <http://www.edo.org.au/edoqld/edoqld/new/2011-06-15%20Ltr%20to%20Premier%20on%20mining%20&%20CSG%20processes.pdf>

² <http://www.edo.org.au/edoqld/edoqld/new/10.06%20Public%20Interest%20Funding%20call.htm>

³ Detailed application to fund lawyer and scientific officer and associated expenses costing \$812,000 over 3 years sent to Minister Robertson with copies to Minister Kate Jones and Premier Bligh dated 27 July 2010 and refused.

If you want to know what is happening in an urban areas in Brisbane its straightforward. Got Council's to PD online and you can see what developments are proposed for your area or street and get copies of the applications and documents so you can make a submission.

But if you are a rural landholder, there is no website you can go to see notifications of public submission rights on environmental authorities, plus copies of application and documents so you can make a submission in time. This is undemocratic as these coal seam gas projects or mining projects will have massive impacts on the environment and community that may last for many decades. The government is keeping citizens in the dark about these projects- where is the fairness and transparency?

For more information contact Jo Bragg on 3211 4466

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