



The Hon Chris Hartcher

Minister for Resources and Energy

Special Minister of State

Minister for the Central Coast

MEDIA RELEASE

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NSW GOVT HAS LISTENED AND ACTED: TOUGH NEW CONDITIONS FOR COAL & COAL SEAM GAS

The NSW Government is introducing tough new rules for coal and coal seam gas exploration and mining which will see a ban on the use of toxic chemicals, greater public consultation, stronger environmental requirements and an extension of the moratorium on 'fracking' until the end of the year, Minister for Resources and Energy Chris Hartcher announced today.

Mr Hartcher said the 60-day moratorium period, which ends on Saturday, has allowed for the development of new provisions which will apply to all new coal and coal seam gas licence applications following consultation with stakeholders.

"During our consultation period, the community expressed a number of concerns and we've listened. Now we're acting by introducing these tougher conditions on coal and coal seam gas mining."

In future, all new coal and coal seam gas exploration and mining licence applications will be subject to new rules:

- A ban on the use of BTEX chemicals (benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene and xylenes) as additives during coal seam gas drilling. The Government's Stakeholder Reference Group is reviewing this process;
- An extended moratorium until 31 December 2011 on the use of hydraulic fracturing or 'fracking' during coal seam gas drilling;
- A regulation that requires extraction of more than 3 megalitres per year from groundwater sources to hold a water access licence;
- A ban on the use of evaporation ponds relating to coal seam gas; and
- New public consultation guidelines to increase transparency and accountability to be finalised in consultation with the Government's Stakeholder Reference Group.

"We understand there needs to be a balance between agricultural land and mining and we're determined to get that balance right," Mr Hartcher said.

“That is why we will require all new applications for mining or petroleum projects which have the potential to affect agricultural resources or industries to submit an Agriculture Impact Statement.

“It is also why we are identifying strategic agricultural lands and through the Strategic Regional Land Use policy process, ensuring that provisions are included to maintain the significant value of these lands.”

Mr Hartcher said the consultative process allowed communities to express a number of concerns about exploration and mining for coal and coal seam gas.

"Concerns were raised about certain practices which appear to be commonplace overseas and in other states.

“Though many of these practices are not widely used in NSW, our Government has moved quickly to ensure they do not become standard practice for industry in NSW.

“Communities can be assured they’ve got a receptive ear in the NSW Government,” Mr Hartcher said.

The NSW Government is currently developing a new online resource to provide details of licence approval and conditions documents.

“These communities cannot be expected to come to an informed conclusion about exploration and mining activities unless they have access to accurate scientific facts and information.

“The level of public access we will be providing is unprecedented. It’s only fair that communities have access to as much information surrounding the approvals and conditions process as possible,” Mr Hartcher said.

Stricter protocols for the Review of Environmental Factors (REF) process are also being developed.

The new conditions will be applied to all coal and coal seam gas applications referred to the Division of Resources and Energy. Any obligations applicants have under new and existing planning laws where their project is also subject to State Development assessment by the Department of Planning will remain in place.