

Media Release 06.12.2023

Water Trigger will Protect Precious Water Resources from Fracking

Dr Sophie Scamps, Independent MP for Mackellar

Australia will now have more comprehensive protection of its water resources when companies are exploring and extracting gas using fracking. This follows the federal government's adoption of an expanded "water trigger" that Dr Scamps has been advocating for.

"I am delighted that the Albanese Government has adopted the thrust of my bill and included it in environmental legislation now before parliament. It was desperately needed, particularly because the several gas fracking projects in the Beetaloo basin were set to be appraised by the NT government in the near future," Dr Scamps said.

"Without my and others' advocacy it may never have happened. Action to close this gap in legislation was recommended by a Senate committee last April but there had been no movement from the government until I moved my private members bill in October.

The Senate last night passed new water trigger laws modelled on Dr Scamps Private Member's Bill which she introduced to Parliament in October. It is expected to pass the House of Representatives today.

The new laws strengthen the water trigger in the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC Act) to ensure **all** unconventional gas fracking projects are assessed by the Federal Environment Minister for their impact on local water resources.

"This is a huge breakthrough as it means that future projects in areas like the massive proposed Beetaloo basin development in the Northern Territory will now have to undertake studies of the likely impact on aquifers and rivers and get federal approval before proceeding," Dr Scamps said.

Until last night, only coal seam gas projects were required to be assessed and approved under Australia's national environment laws. Other types of unconventional gas projects, such as those that extract shale and tight gas were exempt.

"I've been working hard to get stronger protections for our precious rivers and aquifers by strengthening our national environment laws," Dr Scamps said.

"This included introducing a private members bill to ensure all types of gas mining projects have to be assessed under the strengthened national environment laws.

“So I am delighted that the government is introducing an amendment that would provide similar powers to what I proposed in my Bill.

Dr Scamps said: “The State of the Environment Report released last year outlined just how dire environmental degradation is in Australia with many ecosystems on the brink of collapse.

“We need long term thinking and vision to prevent the desertification and destruction of the Australian landscape. This is such a step”.

Dr Scamps’ bill had the backing of Traditional Owners in the Beetaloo basin, Lock the Gate Alliance, the Australian Conservation Foundation, the Environment Centre NT, the former MP, Tony Windsor and many others

“I thank them for their support which has now achieved this fantastic outcome”.

Comments from the executive director of the Environment Centre NT, Kirsty Howey:

“Communities across the Northern Territory are rightly celebrating today with the news that the Australian Parliament has finally listened to their concerns.”

“This landmark reform will create a major new hurdle for gas companies, and most importantly safeguard the Northern Territory’s free-flowing rivers and aquifers from the dangerous impacts of fracking,” she said.

Comments from Ray Dimakarri Dixon, Mudburra Elder:

“We have been standing up for water in our environment for so long and we have been doing this for our country, past leaders and future generations. This is the biggest thing in my lifetime. Water keeps our culture and our identity strong. It connects all indigenous people.”

“I want to thank Lock the Gate Alliance for getting us to Canberra and all the environmental groups who supported us. I also want to thank the Independent crossbench, the Greens and Federal Labor for helping us protect our water and country from these fracking giants.”

“This fight isn't going away but today I feel emotional and happy in my spirit. Our young people can learn from this moment,” he said

For interviews with Dr Scamps: Anne Davies 0408223875
media@sophiescamps.com.au