

Dear Editor -

On March 9th as Chairman of the Basin Sustainability Alliance (BSA) I attended hearings before the SDNR&AID Parliamentary Committee reviewing the problematic Mineral, Water and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018 at Parliament House.

This approachable committee consists of three Government and three Opposition Members and is competently chaired by the ALP Member for Bancroft, Chris Whiting. The Committee has to report back to Parliament by 9th April.

BSA, two law firms, a major feedlot operator and a rural consultant took on DNRME over its attempt to rewrite history and restrict compensation on Petroleum & Gas and Mineral Tenures.

The Department's questionable retrospective interpretation is that only landowners or occupiers within a gasfield or minerals exploration area that have advanced activities occurring on their own land, have had compensatable rights.

We say that's totally wrong and that current legislation provides compensation for all impacted landholders within the tenure. Alarmingly if DNRME win, the Bill will be enacted and owners or occupiers without advanced activities on their properties will have no right to compensation.

This is regardless of how severely they are affected by airborne impacts emanating from activities on other owners' land such as noise, fugitive gases, odours, dust and lighting which can massively degrade property values and health.

Significantly our landholder alliance's combined view was supported by an opinion provided by a highly regarded Queen's Counsel setting out detailed reasons why the Department's claims are wrong. The Department was instructed to take the legal opinion on notice and respond to the Committee.

We continue to unearth further legislative history and more facts to debunk the Department's claims. Officially submissions to the Committee have closed, but we hope the Committee will still consider new relevant information.

I hope the passion and reason with which the landholder alliance defended landholder's rights means justice is still in there with a chance. I was impressed with the Committee's conduct of the hearing, but worry that Minister Lynham and indeed Parliament itself will take some persuading before accepting that the Department's claims are false. But we know we're right and we'll give it our best effort.

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