

Counter Arguments in Supporting the Continuation of Coal Seam Gas (CSG) Mining in Australia and Their Validity

Written by Georgy Hadwen, HOPE researcher Qld

1. Economic Benefits and Job Creation

- **Argument:** Proponents of CSG mining argue that it creates significant economic opportunities, particularly in rural and regional communities. The industry is seen as a job creator, providing employment in areas where alternative job opportunities may be limited. It also contributes to government revenues through royalties and taxes, which can fund public services and infrastructure.
- **Assessment:** While there is evidence that CSG mining has boosted employment and economic growth in regions like **Queensland's Surat Basin**, these benefits are often short-term and dependent on ongoing development projects. Additionally, studies suggest that the economic benefits must be weighed against the potential long-term costs of environmental damage and reduced agricultural productivity. This raises questions about the sustainability and net economic benefit of CSG mining in the long run.

2. Energy Security and Transition Fuel

- **Argument:** CSG is promoted as a transitional energy source that can help Australia move from coal to renewable energy. Supporters claim that it produces fewer carbon emissions than coal when used for power generation, making it a cleaner alternative in the short term while the infrastructure for renewables is developed.
- **Assessment:** While it is true that CSG produces less carbon dioxide than coal when burned, concerns have emerged about **methane emissions** during extraction and transport, which can negate these benefits. Methane is a potent greenhouse gas, and leaks from CSG operations can substantially impact Australia's overall emissions profile. Therefore, while CSG may provide some benefits for energy security, its role as a sustainable transition fuel is debatable.

3. Export Opportunities and Economic Growth

- **Argument:** CSG exports, particularly in the form of liquefied natural gas (LNG), are a significant source of revenue for Australia. The global demand for LNG provides an opportunity for Australia to become a major exporter, contributing to the national economy and enhancing trade partnerships.
- **Assessment:** While the export market has indeed been lucrative, there are significant risks associated with the volatility of global gas prices, which can affect the industry's stability. Furthermore, there is a growing international shift towards renewable energy, with countries implementing stricter emissions targets. This shift could diminish future demand for LNG, rendering further investment in CSG infrastructure potentially uneconomical. This raises questions about the long-term validity of this argument.

4. Minimal Impact on Water Resources

- **Argument:** Industry proponents claim that modern techniques and regulatory controls minimise the impact of fracking on groundwater and surface water resources. They argue that monitoring systems are in place to manage water use and ensure the protection of agricultural areas.
- **Assessment:** Research has shown that while some monitoring measures exist, they may not be sufficient to prevent contamination risks or manage the cumulative impacts of multiple CSG projects on water resources. Inquiries, such as the **Queensland Land Court's review**, have found evidence of potential harm to water supplies, questioning the effectiveness of current regulations and oversight. This suggests that claims of minimal impact may underestimate the risks associated with CSG extraction.

5. Support from Landowners and Communities

- **Argument:** Some proponents highlight the agreements made with landowners, where farmers and local communities benefit financially through compensation for land access. They argue that these partnerships demonstrate community acceptance and economic cooperation.
- **Assessment:** While some landowners have accepted compensation, there is significant opposition from others who cite concerns over land degradation, reduced property values, and long-term impacts on water resources. Additionally, Indigenous groups have expressed concerns over the impact of CSG projects on culturally significant lands. Public protests and resistance in states like **New South Wales** suggest that community support is far from universal, raising questions about the social licence of the industry to operate.

Conclusion

While the arguments supporting the continuation of coal seam gas mining in Australia highlight potential economic and transitional energy benefits, they often overlook or underestimate the environmental, social, and economic risks involved. The validity of these arguments is increasingly challenged by evidence from independent research and regulatory inquiries, suggesting a need for more sustainable and less harmful energy alternatives.

References

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