

Carrying the Clarence Valley Flag at the Casino Blockade.

21st June 2012

The decision by Metgasco to construct more waste water holding ponds at its South Casino site off Benns Road, has concerned anti CSG groups that had been promised that evaporation ponds for toxic waste water had been banned. As a result a decision was made to blockade the site on the morning of Wednesday, June 20.

One protester locked himself onto a machine and was ultimately arrested, but the blockade, attended by some 70 protesters was deemed a success with media delivering wide coverage of the event.



The partially constructed waste water holding pond at Casino, situated just above the floodplain

The following day, Dianne and I travelled up to fly the flag and provide support for day 2 of the protest, which saw an estimated 100 people blockade the site, but which turned out to be something of an anticlimax, with the contractors being a 'no show'.

There is already one evaporation pond on site, but Metgasco, in its usual sneaky fashion has managed to get around the ban on evaporation ponds by digging the new hole a meter or so deeper and calling it a storage pond.

This highlights the ineffectiveness of so-called government actions to regulate and control the unconventional gas industry. Frankly, I believe that has been intentional, with the O'Farrell Government simply wanting to be seen to be doing something, but ensuring they don't upset their mates in the mining business.



The existing approved evaporation pond at Metgasco's South Casino site



A damp 'tide line' shows how close this pond is to overflowing, and there is nothing to prevent spillages from flowing directly into an adjacent drainage line/gully, and on to creeks and rivers.

The inadequacy of the existing pond is clear. There is nothing, no sumps or barriers, to prevent a spill, and in the event of heavy rain, it will simply overflow into the gully some 50 metres below the site, and into the Shannon Brook Creek.

The clearly visible damp line above the water line, indicates that the toxic water is already lapping close to the brim and was threatening to spill over in the light breeze that was creating small waves on the day.

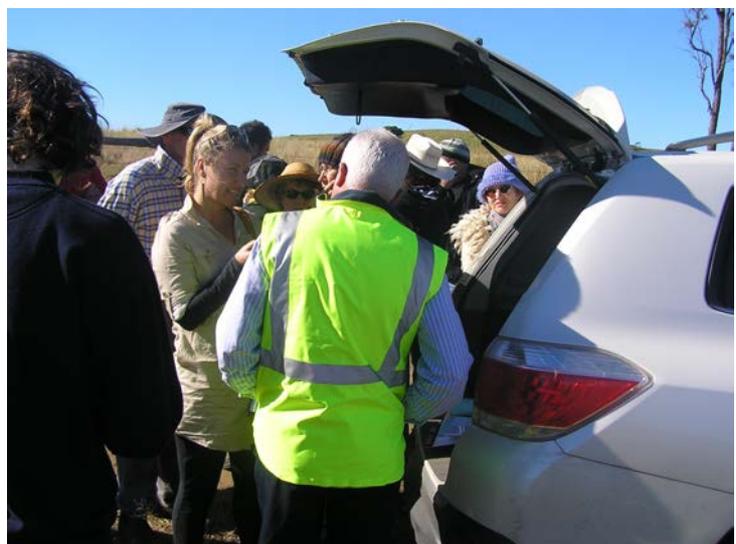
The highlight of day 2 was an early morning march onto the site, with media in attendance to record the defiant gesture, with everyone carrying shovels and spades which were used to shovel soil back into the partially completed pit.



Day 2 protest gathering at the Metgasco waste water pond site at South Casino

Metgasco sent one unfortunate Council officer along to inform us that they had all the required permits to legally undertake the work, and try to explain the technical differences between an evaporation pond, and a holding pond. Essentially, that difference is determined by the depth of the water in the pond, and not the amount of surface evaporation. It's a joke!

A very good media release has been sent out by the protest group, highlighting these issues.



A Council officer attempts to explain the technical difference between evaporation and holding ponds

By contrast, the Minister, Chris Harcher, produced a lame media release full of contradictions and meaningless platitudes which will no doubt be circulated in the next day or so.

Later the police arrived briefly to inform the crowd that Metgasco was happy for the protesters to remain as long as they didn't enter the site, and in a move obviously designed to regain the moral high ground, announced they had no intention of causing conflict so had decided not to recommence work until after the blockade was lifted.



The last I heard was talk of forming a roster to ensure a presence for as long as it takes.



The bottom line is that unconventional gas is as dirty a fuel as coal. Burning that gas and coal will lead to catastrophic climate change. With the International Energy Agency warning that the world is on track for 6 degrees of warming by 2100, this madness must be stopped.

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