

Science, Risk and Legitimacy: Investigating the governance of science in the CSG policy arena.

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What is the project about

The material and political conditions in which scientific knowledge is produced are growing concerns in policy debates regarding contentious issues such as Coal Seam Gas (CSG)..

This point has been emphasised by a recent communiqué from the Academy of Technology, Science and Engineering December 2015 which states;

“It is important that credible, impartial and trusted sources of knowledge and expertise communicate scientific, technical and socio-economic facts, models, anticipated outcomes and uncertainties in a clear, transparent and readily accessible way.”

Organisations providing scientific knowledge to inform decision-making play an important role in enhancing and underpinning scientific integrity and trust in public debates.

This project seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the roles of research and science actors within the CSG arena in Queensland?
2. What are the key factors that shape and influence the research organisation and production of scientific knowledge in this context?
3. What is the relationship between the scientific knowledge produced and policy-making?



What the researcher has done

Data for the research has been collected by reviewing key policy texts and documents produced by key research actors relevant to CSG such as:

- The Centre for Coal Seam Gas at UQ (CCSG)
- CSIRO's Gas Industry Social and Environmental Research Alliance (GISERA)
- The Independent Expert Scientific Committee (IESC)
- And The Gas Fields Commission Queensland (GFCQ)

During 2014 I undertook 9 months of fieldwork which included observations, conversations, interviews and engagement with actors within the science network. This included interviews with government representatives in QLD and NSW, as well as scientists and other stakeholders from civil society and industry.

I also attended a range of research meetings and observed how knowledge is produced and how decisions are made in the CSG arena. I analysed these interactions and documented information flows, which has provided material for further deliberation and analysis.

What I am finding out

- “Science is not part of the debate, it is the debate”

The Hon Martin Ferguson AM, Sept 2015, ATSE Conference, Sydney.

Interim Findings:

- There is an intimate relationship between science and politics in debates on CSG in Australia. Consequently, science organisations must have an awareness of the political context that is associated with the CSG industry.
- Concern for the governance of science has grown. Good governance mechanisms include:
 - providing opportunities to embed stakeholder representation and participation through reference committees, community cabinets or stakeholder advisory boards,
 - demonstrating transparency and accountability by timely publication of research and providing organisational information such as research agendas and funding criteria,
 - engaging with the public through public forums, open days and a variety of media platforms.
- Social licence for the CSG industry and for science can be built by using good governance mechanisms that build community trust, promote organisational legitimacy, meet community expectations, provide procedural fairness and develop science-based policy.