Tuesday, 18 November 2014

Making the planning system simpler for the community
– response to the Gas Plan

The Office of Coal Seam Gas within the Division of Resources and Energy will be responsible for assessment of all coal seam gas exploration under changes to planning rules currently on exhibition as part of the NSW Government’s Gas Plan.

The changes form part of the Government’s response to the Chief Scientist’s review into coal seam gas activities in NSW.

The Chief Scientist and Engineer found that regulation of gas activities was too complex, involving several Government agencies and 14 different pieces of legislation. This has made it difficult to differentiate agencies and their specific responsibilities and has eroded community confidence.

The new process for gas exploration under the planning system will ensure that one agency – the Office of Coal Seam Gas within the Division of Resources and Energy – is responsible for all gas exploration activity in NSW.

Under the new process a company proposing gas exploration must prepare a Review of Environmental Factors, which examines and responds to all potential impacts of the proposal.

If the Office of Coal Seam Gas within the Division of Resources and Energy considers the impacts of a proposal are significant then an Environmental Impact Statement would have to be prepared for public exhibition.

Gas production will still be assessed by the Department of Planning and Environment under current arrangements.

This includes the independent Gateway process to provide tough upfront safeguards for the State’s most valuable farmland as well as public exhibition of a full Environmental Impact Statement.

The Department of Planning and Environment is also publicly exhibiting a new policy, which sets out clear standards for noise and dust impacts of mining on neighbouring properties.

The policy sets out the responsibilities of a mining company to ensure that appropriate mitigation measures are in place to reduce the impact of noise and dust and makes clear the circumstances under which the company needs to offer to buy affected neighbouring land.
The policy in no way makes it compulsory for landholders to sell affected land.

Submissions on both policies are open until 2 December 2014. More information on the policies is available at http://www.planning.nsw.gov.au