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NSW GOVERNMENT PROTECTS KEY FARMLAND AND HOMES

The NSW Government is continuing implementation of its landmark commitment to protect prime agricultural land and water resources while providing greater certainty for landholders and the resources industry.

Minister for Planning and Infrastructure Brad Hazzard, Minister for Resources and Energy Chris Hartcher and Minister for Primary Industries Katrina Hodgkinson said the changes delivered key elements of the NSW Government's Strategic Regional Land Use Policy while at the same time ensuring a viable and strong resources industry to secure the State's energy needs.

"Earlier this year the Premier announced tough new measures to further strengthen the regulation of the CSG industry in NSW, including introducing a two kilometre buffer for new CSG activities across existing residential zones, as well as lands identified for future residential growth," Mr Hazzard said.

"Today we are implementing these initiatives and in doing so outlining greater protection for more than five million hectares of residential and farming land across the State.

"This is the first time in the State's history there has been such extensive mapping and protection for our homes and farms."

"Under Labor, coal seam gas (CSG) exploration licences were granted and renewed with no concern for potential agricultural or water impacts, and with no concern for the land's use.

"We have put in place the toughest CSG controls in Australia.

"Communities will now have peace of mind with the two kilometre exclusion zone for new CSG activity around residential areas," Mr Hazzard said.

The changes announced today cover four key commitments:

CSG exclusion zones

- CSG exclusion zones in force over an estimated 95 per cent of dwellings covered by current petroleum licenses.
- The Government is now exhibiting proposals to expand CSG exclusion zones ("stage-two exclusion zones") around:
 - Seven rural residential areas that met specific village criteria
 - Future growth areas in 56 council areas across NSW.

Statewide mapping: Biophysical Strategic Agricultural Land

- 2.8 million hectares of the State's most valuable farming land – known as Biophysical Strategic Agricultural Land (BSAL) – will now be protected through the Gateway process which ensures the impacts of resource development on agriculture and water are considered up front in the assessment process. BSAL has been identified across the state including in the Central West; Mid and Far North Coast, Southern Highlands, Western, South Coast and Illawarra.
- This includes the 1.74 million hectares of BSAL already mapped in the New England North West and Upper Hunter regions in September 2012.
- The NSW Government will now exhibit mapping which identifies more than one million additional hectares of BSAL.

Critical Industry Clusters

- When it announced these Critical Industry Clusters in September 2012, the NSW Government agreed that a regional scale review and verification of the initial critical industry cluster maps should be undertaken.
- Completed verification mapping has been placed on exhibition to ensure all relevant equine clusters or viticulture enterprises are captured.

Gateway panel and process

- Any State significant mining or CSG proposal on BSAL has to go through an additional level of scrutiny via the Gateway process.
- Six members have been appointed to the Gateway panel, which will provide an independent, scientific assessment of major resources projects on BSAL and in the Upper Hunter's Critical Industry Clusters.

The appointed panel members and their areas of expertise are:

- **Mr Terry Short (Chair)** – agricultural scientist
- **Professor Garry Willgoose** – groundwater expert
- **Mr George Gates** – groundwater expert
- **Dr Ian Lavering** – geologist
- **Mr Brett Whelan** – agricultural scientist
- **Mr Russell Frith** – mining engineer

Mr Short said he was honoured to have been asked to make such an important contribution to rural land-use planning.

“The establishment of the Gateway system is a tremendous step forward for rural NSW.

“It is a voice that rural NSW hasn't had to date in the planning process,” he said.

Ms Hodgkinson said the development of the Upper Hunter Critical Industry Clusters involved extensive consultation and that the maps now include 464 viticulture and 297 equine properties.

“When the NSW Government released its Aquifer Interference Policy last September, it ensured this State put in place the best groundwater protection framework of any jurisdiction in Australia,” Ms Hodgkinson said.

“Today’s announcement takes the NSW Government one step further towards balancing the responsible growth of the mining and resource industries with the needs of primary industries and communities.”

Mr Hazzard said the Government was pleased to put in place the first stage of CSG exclusion zones which covers an estimated 95 per cent of homes covered by current petroleum licenses.

“We always said that we would also examine the exclusion zones in future proposed residential areas – along with rural residential areas which could be regarded as villages – and are now seeking feedback on this,” he said.

“Importantly, however, the Government has also made it clear that, now we’ve defined these sensitive areas, we will fully support mining proposals which are in the right places and pass our rigorous and independent assessment system.”

Mr Hartcher welcomed implementation of the regulatory regime, saying it provides greater certainty for the resources sector as well as existing land uses and residents.

“We are delivering a regulatory regime which better balances competing land uses, allowing for the continued growth of our world class resources sector while protecting our agricultural land and water resources.

“The NSW Government recognises the need to develop our own domestic gas industry in acceptable locations and in compliance with world best practice regulations which will continue to support our important manufacturing industries and help maintain affordable gas for over 1.2 million households across the State,” Mr Hartcher said.

More information is available at www.planning.nsw.gov.au/srlup

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