



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**BILLS**

**Environment Protection and Biodiversity  
Conservation Amendment (Independent Expert  
Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and  
Large Coal Mining Development) Bill 2012**

**Consideration in Detail**

**SPEECH**

**Tuesday, 29 May 2012**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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# SPEECH

**Date** Tuesday, 29 May 2012  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Katter, Bob, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

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**Mr KATTER** (Kennedy) (18:05): I move the amendment circulated in my name:

(1) Schedule 1, page 8 (after line 9), at the end of the Schedule, add:

**12 Aquifer drilling—12 month moratorium**

(1) A person commits an offence if:

- (a) the person takes an action; and
- (b) the person takes the action for the purposes of, or in connection with, coal seam gas extraction; and
- (c) the action is, or results in, drilling through or into an aquifer; and
- (d) the drilling occurs within 12 months after the commencement of this item.

Penalty:

- (a) for an individual—\$200,000; and
- (b) for a body corporate—\$2,000,000.

(2) Subitem (1) applies only if:

- (a) the person is a corporation to which paragraph 51(xx) of the Constitution applies; or
- (b) the action is taken for the purposes of trade or commerce:
  - (i) between Australia and another country; or
  - (ii) between 2 States; or
  - (iii) between a State and a Territory; or
  - (iv) between 2 Territories; or
- (c) the action is taken in a Territory.

(3) Subitem (1) does not apply if the action is taken to facilitate safer coal mining.

(4) This item has effect despite any provision of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* or any other Act.

The amendment is pretty simple, really. It says that we should have a year's moratorium. The honourable member for New England has criticised me for opposing the \$150 million. I do not mean to be disrespectful but \$150 million to do this study is, in my opinion, a waste of taxpayers' money of indecent proportions, to be quite frank with you. If you want to know the science of it, I will explain it to you outside. You laugh, but if you had taken the time to find out a little bit about the gases that are inherent and their effect in an aquifer then you would know that it is inherently dangerous, my friend. And, if you had listened, what I said earlier on is that if you have casing it is only as good as how long it is going to last. You would know, as I do—both of us coming from the country—that bore casing, whether it is plastic or something else, is not going to last all that long because there are movements in the ground all the time.

I think I should have moved for two years rather than one year, and I agree with the criticism from the honourable member behind me on this issue. If you are saying that we need money to do some scientific research, I would agree with the member for New England. I applaud him and thank him, as I have done publicly and privately on the issue. As to whether it should be money of that dimension: no, I am sorry, I have always been a person that is very tight-fisted with government money. My many years in the ministries would attest to my frugality and I will not be apologising to anyone for that. Actually, I am quite proud of it.

As for the amendment being moved here, firstly, it is no use doing the scientific research whilst they are out there drilling holes through the aquifer. You stop the drilling. And until you do stop it for scientific research, whether you consider it necessary to the extent of \$150 million or whether you consider it necessary to the extent of a few million dollars, which would be my position, we will argue that. But the thing that should not be argued is that they are out there drilling the holes without the scientific knowledge belonging to the member for New England or the minister or the government. I think that is grossly irresponsible. I fully agree with the honourable member behind me here in saying that there should be a moratorium until that scientific work is done and assessed.

The second issue is that, quite frankly, I just do not think the risks taken by drilling through the aquifers are justified—and we are talking about the artesian aquifers. I take the minister's point that there is great argument about whether the aquifers, which we call the Great Artesian Basin, are interconnected or whether they are not. I put on the table my scientific evidence that Spring Creek runs for 82 kilometres west of Boulia in arguably the hottest, driest place on earth—though San Fernando in California would argue otherwise, and there is another place in South America and one part of Africa. It is as hot and dry as any climate on earth. To be able to get a creek to run for 82 kilometres an awful lot of water has to be coming out. I just do not think that that amount of water would come unless the aquifers were interconnected, and I can present an awful lot of other evidence to that effect. So I just do not believe that we should be drilling through the aquifers.

Quite frankly, the aquifers in my area, the Great Artesian Basin, are at 1,500 feet. Surely you can find a lot of gas without having to go down below 1,500 feet. Also, because it is an aquifer, it has to have an impervious layer above it and an impervious layer below it, otherwise it is not an aquifer. The impervious layer below it is generally accepted as bedrock. I do not know—it is going to cost a lot to go through bedrock, and I would not have thought the chance of finding stuff beneath would be particularly good. We have people out there drilling holes. It looks good on a prospectus, and they will have a lot of gobbledegook scientific jargon in the prospectus. Quite frankly, we have a name for it in the bush but I cannot use that name here. (*Time expired*)