

## Media release

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### Landmark report reveals how regional communities really feel about coal seam gas

A landmark report into the social impacts of Coal Seam Gas (CSG) operations on regional communities in Australia was released today.

The report is part of a three year project that looks at how CSG activities impact on a community's wellbeing and functioning. The report draws on a survey of a representative sample of 400 residents in the Western Downs region of south-west Queensland.

CSIRO scientist Dr. Andrea Walton, the lead author of the report, said "The survey results showed that wellbeing in communities rated favorably and that levels of community resilience were satisfactory. However, planning for the future, leadership within the community and access to relevant information were three areas that people felt were not good enough to deal with changes arising from CSG development."

The results also show that most people in the Western Downs have mixed feelings towards CSG. Most people either tolerated or accepted it (69%) and a minority (22%) approve or embrace it, but relatively few reject it (9%). Around half feel that the community is resisting, not coping, or only just coping with CSG development.

"Our aim is to provide a measure of community wellbeing and to see how communities are responding to change in the context of a rapidly expanding CSG industry.

"What we have found is that although overall wellbeing is robust (3.8/5) there are strong feelings about particular social issues. The three areas that were most negatively perceived were environmental management, decision making and citizen voice, and roads.

"Now that we have captured this data, we hope it can be used by policy makers, community leaders and coal seam gas companies in their decision making and planning" said Dr. Walton

Residents in the Western Downs region, including the communities of Dalby, Chinchilla, Miles, and Tara, and both in-town and out-of-town locals, were interviewed in February 2014. Each person was asked 119 questions aimed at measuring community wellbeing, resilience, future wellbeing and acceptance of coal seam gas development in the area.

Included in the survey were questions relating to personal safety, community spirit and how well informed residents thought they were when it came to decisions made by councils and coal seam gas companies. Questions about future wellbeing showed that 50 per cent of participants thought wellbeing in the region would decline in the next three years.

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Services and facilities, community spirit and cohesion, a socially interactive community, and levels of personal safety and environmental quality were found to be the drivers of community wellbeing. Investments made in wellbeing and resilience could lead to a more optimistic outlook for the future.

“The results show that more positive attitudes to CSG are associated with community perceptions of being resilient, the environment being managed well for the future, good employment and business opportunities, and resources companies, government, and businesses working effectively with residents to deal with changes” said, Dr. Walton.

The three year project is part of the suite of social and environmental research programs funded by the Gas Industry Social & Environmental Research Alliance (GISERA). GISERA is a collaborative vehicle established to undertake publicly-reported independent research addressing the socio-economic and environmental impacts of Australia’s natural gas industries. The governance structure for GISERA is designed to provide for and protect research independence and transparency of funded research. See [www.gisera.org.au](http://www.gisera.org.au) for more information about GISERA’s governance structure, funded projects, and research findings.



Shops on the main street of Chinchilla

For further information contact:

Tsuey Cham 07 3833 5673 or 0467 811 534 [tsuey.cham@csiro.au](mailto:tsuey.cham@csiro.au)