



Natural gas: impacts and opportunities on primary industries in south east South Australia

This project assists community understanding and informs public policy development relating to potential primary industry impacts and opportunities associated with conventional gas development in the south east region of South Australia.

KEY FACTS

- Local conventional gas activities have generally been well accepted by primary producers over a long period.
- A negative shift in views on natural gas reflects increased community awareness of the potential for development using unconventional gas technology, particularly the impact of hydraulic fracturing on local water resources.
- Local stakeholders value the “clean and green” image of the region targeted in regional growth strategies.
- The value of local ground water resources, agriculture and regional brands were considered to outweigh the perceived local benefits and risks from any future non-conventional gas development, should it occur.
- Study participants felt that communication of important information on issues such as industry regulation or monitoring was ineffective, allowing extreme voices to dominate debate, and potentially damage regional image and integrity of local brands.
- A role for the provision of clear, accurate and science-based messages from an independent and trusted source was recognised.

Known as the Limestone Coast, the south east region of South Australia features the state’s second largest city Mount Gambier, diverse industries including tourism, wineries, agriculture, forestry, food manufacturing and pulp and paper processing, and spectacular landscapes ranging from rugged coastline to desert.

This project collated basic data on the environment of the local primary industries in south east South Australia, interviewed people working in primary industries, and reviewed scientific literature relating to issues raised in the interviews.

Results of this research provide valuable insights into the views of primary producers towards conventional and unconventional gas, and help inform decision-making and community discussion around proposals to further develop local conventional gas resources.



Cropping and forestry operations near Penola.

Study area

The selected study area for this research covers an area of approximately 150,000 hectares.

It includes many of the natural gas assets and activities in the region, including exploration licenses, exploration and production wells, processing facilities and distribution infrastructure.

Stakeholders interviewed for this project came from the following localities within the study area: Penola, Coonawarra, Millicent, Kalangadoo, Naracoorte, Wattle Range, Fox, and Conmurra.

Data collection

Perspectives on the impacts and opportunities arising from natural gas opportunities were sought from stakeholders involved in the following local primary industry sectors: livestock (sheep and beef), broadacre cropping, grape growing, wine making, potatoes, farm consultants, rural land specialists and local government.

In-depth interviews were conducted in areas gas has already or is proposed to be developed. All interviews included the same set of questions and were typically conducted face to face at the participant’s nominated location.

Results

Interview responses reflected a wide range of highly articulate and thoughtful insights into local primary production, community values, future directions, and views on natural gas, both conventional and unconventional.

Note: the following statements provide a snapshot of key themes; the full report [gisera.csiro.au/project/gas-impacts-and-opportunities-on-primary-industries/] provides comprehensive verbatim responses to interview questions.

Primary producers are proud of the productive capacity and diversity of production of the south east region, and view the unique quality and importance of local water resources as a critical asset to be protected.

Familiarity with the history of local conventional gas development meant that primary producers were generally accepting of conventional gas production and also of gas infrastructure at a small scale co-located with agricultural activities.

However, a recurring message was that “clean and green” primary production is worth more than perceived benefits of the gas industry.

In particular, the perceived possibility of unconventional gas development and specifically hydraulic fracturing was viewed as both different to previous conventional gas production and as a perceived threat to the “clean and green” image.

A lack of independent community communication on development proposals and possible impacts concerned participants because it allowed polarised and emotional perspectives to dominate public debate.

Further, many participants sought a more balanced community discussion with greater engagement by community members representing the ‘middle ground’, with support for clear, accurate messages from an independent and trusted source.

Others’ experiences

Significant research already undertaken in other regions and other resource developments can help explore similarities and differences with south east South Australia.

This project included a review of scientific literature, regional policy directions and strategic initiatives both here in Australia (the Surat Basin in Queensland and the Hunter Valley in New South Wales), as well as in the United States.

This review found the experiences of people in south east of South Australia are similar with perceptions from stakeholders in other gas development areas, or areas undergoing other forms of resource development, such as wind energy generation.

Further research

In many cases, the research is clear and assists in understanding attitudes in south east of South Australia.

However, some areas may benefit from further research:

- quantitative analysis of resource development impacts on regional and market brands
- investigating the impact of debate on the perceived value of brands
- exploring the value of ‘middle ground’ or ‘quiet’ community views on resource development to provide greater diversity of opinion in important community discussions.



Conventional gas exploration rig near Penola.

MORE INFORMATION

Read about the project here
gisera.csiro.au/project/gas-impacts-and-opportunities-on-primary-industries/
Learn about other research in south east South Australia
gisera.csiro.au/project/states/sa/

ABOUT CSIRO's GISERA

The Gas Industry Social and Environmental Research Alliance (GISERA) is a collaboration between CSIRO, Commonwealth and state governments and industry established to undertake publicly-reported independent research. The purpose of GISERA is to provide quality assured scientific research and information to communities living in gas development regions focusing on social and environmental topics including: groundwater and surface water, biodiversity, land management, the marine environment, and socio-economic impacts. The governance structure for GISERA is designed to provide for and protect research independence and transparency of research. Visit gisera.csiro.au for more information about GISERA's governance structure, projects and research findings.

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