

Community wellbeing and local attitudes to conventional gas development in south east South Australia

This research establishes baseline data for community wellbeing and local attitudes and perceptions of conventional gas development in the southern Limestone Coast or lower south east region of South Australia.

KEY POINTS

- Using a representative sample, a comprehensive survey was conducted with 533 residents in south east South Australia over four weeks in September and October 2019.
- The survey comprised around 170 questions and measured perceptions of community wellbeing and attitudes towards conventional gas development in the region. It also measured people's concerns and expectations about gas development.
- Results showed that community wellbeing overall in south east South Australia was very high, particularly in Penola and surrounds.
- Attitudes towards conventional gas development in the region presented a spectrum of views, with 22% reject; 28% tolerate, 22% OK with it; 15% approve and 13% embrace.

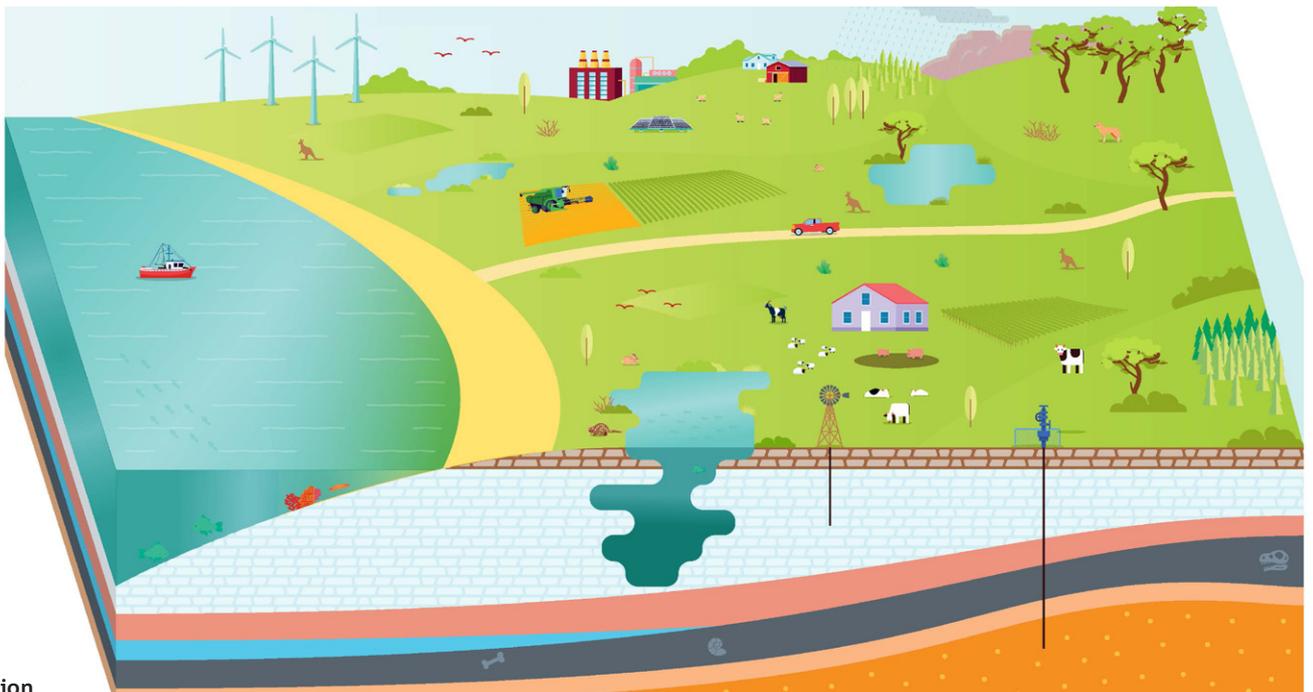
Until around 2011, the Limestone Coast onshore gas industry supplied gas to local business and industry.

For the past decade, gas destined for the region has been sourced from offshore gas fields in Victoria.

The South Australian Government's Plan for Accelerating Exploration (PACE) has funded new conventional gas exploration in the region.

Results from this research can inform planning and decision-making about the state's energy plans, and help understand and address community concerns and expectations about conventional gas development.

The research produced a framework to show the multiple factors important to local communities in forming their views about onshore conventional gas development. These factors represent people's expectations about the industry and what is needed to improve trust and acceptance of conventional gas development in the region.



SA Limestone Coast illustration

Community wellbeing

Community wellbeing scores reflect perceptions about how much the community is a great place to live and whether it offers a great quality of life for all ages.

Fifteen dimensions of community wellbeing were evaluated using approximately 70 questions. These covered social, environmental, political, economic, health, and physical infrastructure aspects of the community (e.g., services, facilities, and economic opportunities).

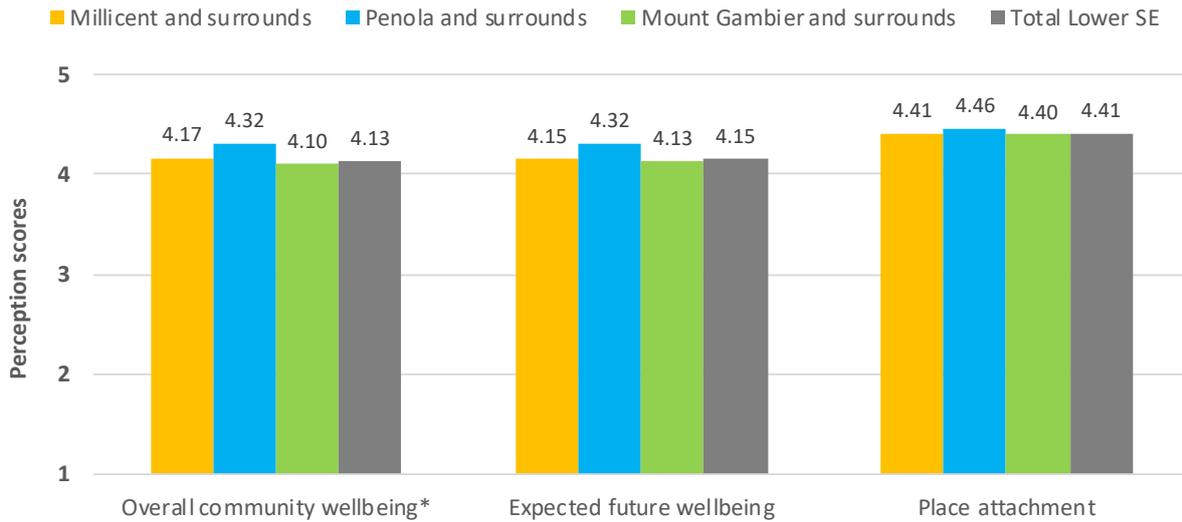
Results showed that community wellbeing overall in South Australia's lower south east region was very robust,

with high scores evident in all sub-regions (Mt Gambier, Penola, and Millicent and their surrounding areas).

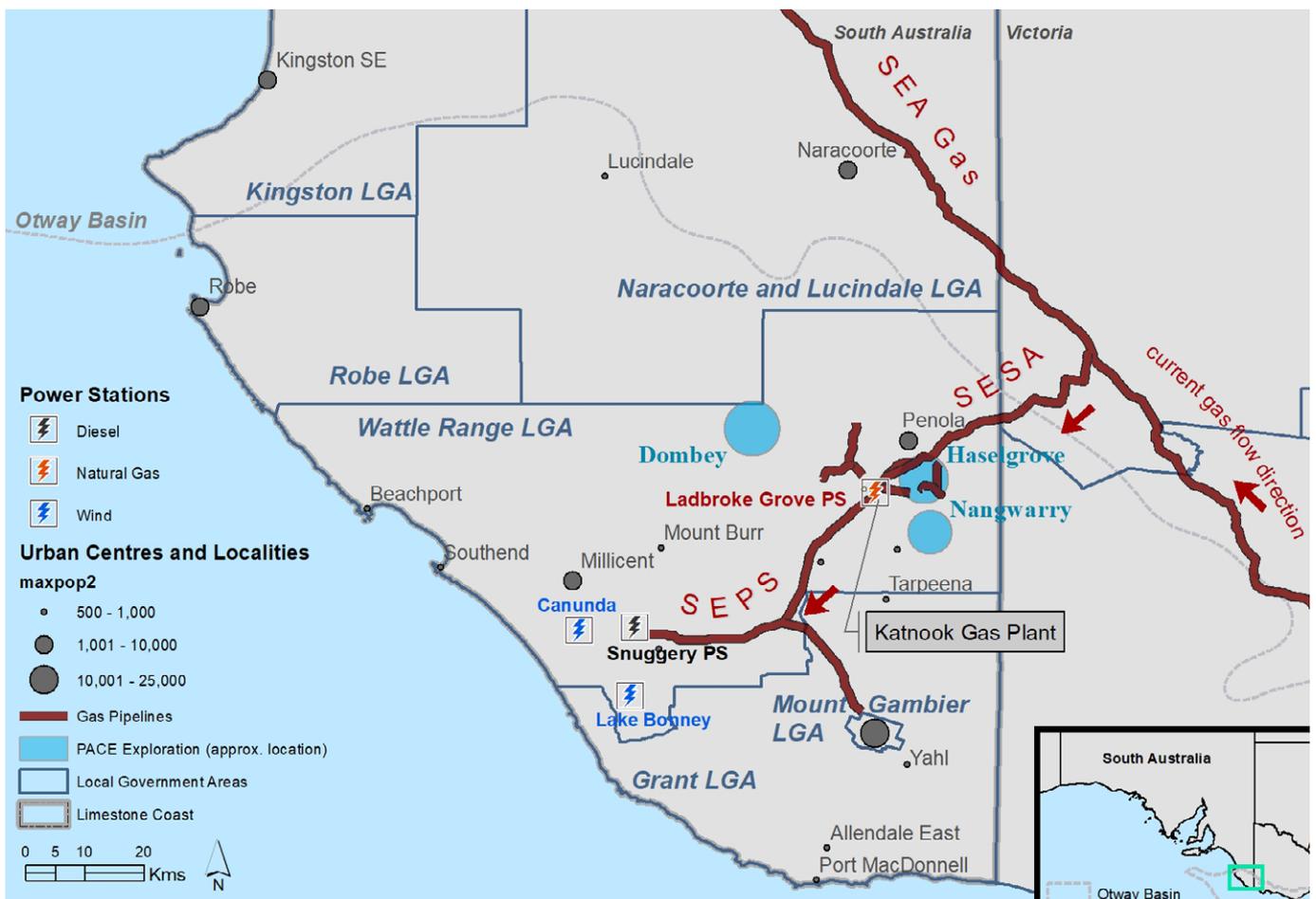
The main drivers of community wellbeing across the region were services and facilities, the quality of the environment, perceptions of personal safety, income sufficiency, and perceptions of community trust.

These very favourable views extended to expectations about the community's future wellbeing three years in the future.

Residents also indicated a very high sense of belonging and pride in their communities as reflected in place attachment scores across the region.



Note: Scores: 1 = lowest and 5 = highest perception; scores < 3 indicate unfavourable perceptions;
* statistical difference in mean scores between subregions



Attitudes and perceptions about conventional gas development

Attitudes towards conventional gas development in south east of South Australia ranged across a spectrum of views:

- 22% of people rejected conventional gas development
- 13% of people embraced conventional gas development
- 65% of people tolerated, would be OK with it, or approved of conventional gas development
 - 28% would tolerate it
 - 22% would be OK with it
 - 15% would approve it.

Researchers also measured people’s feelings towards onshore conventional gas development for each of the attitude categories.

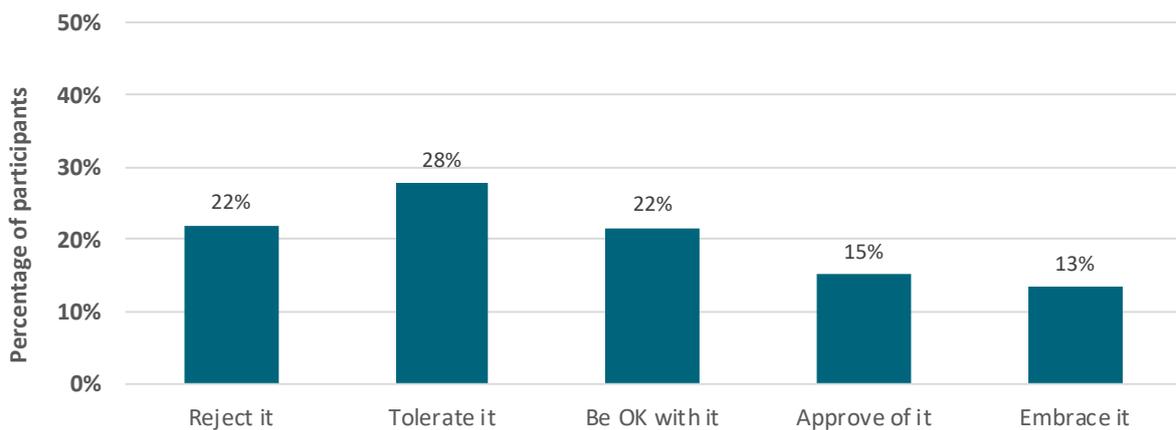
People who “reject” had very negative feelings ($M = 1.74$); people who tolerate had more neutral feelings around the mid-point of three ($M = 2.88$), people who were OK with it had more positive feelings ($M = 3.37$), as did those who approve of ($M = 3.97$) and embrace it ($M = 4.59$).



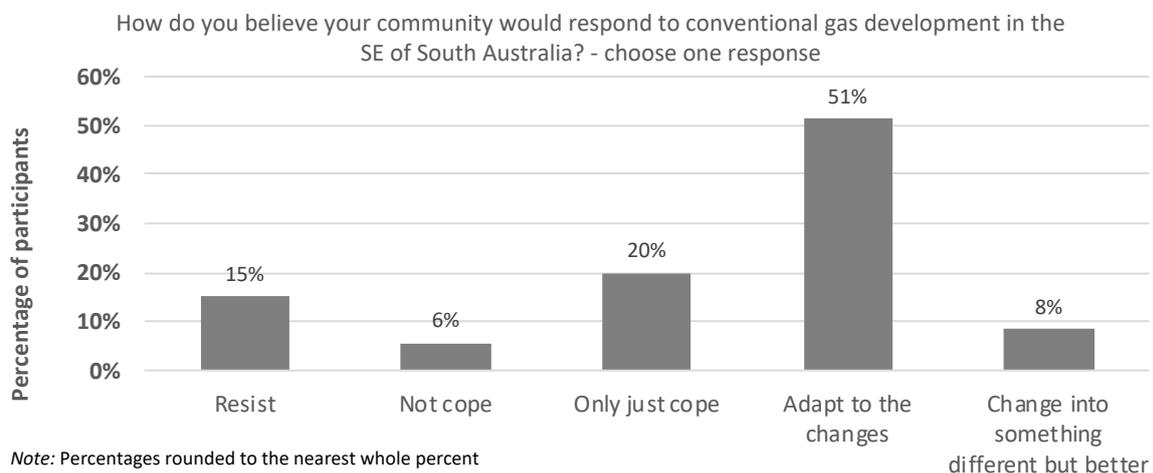
Rural property near Penola

Most people believed that their community would either adapt to the changes associated with conventional gas development (51% of residents) or transform into something different but better (8% of residents).

Forty-one per cent of residents believed that their community would either resist the changes (15%), not cope (6%) or only just cope with the changes (20%).



Note: Percentages rounded to the nearest whole



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Underlying drivers of attitudes towards conventional gas development

Previous research and interviews with stakeholders identified a range of issues that shape and underpin people's overall attitudes and feelings towards conventional gas development.

The survey asked over 70 questions about these issues, which were grouped together into eight key underlying drivers:

- **Perceived impacts:** perceptions or concerns about impacts (immediate issues and possible future issues), risk manageability and risk severity
- **Perceived benefits:** perceptions of possible local, regional and societal benefits
- **Distributional fairness:** perceptions of how fairly impacts and benefits would be shared
- **Trust in the onshore gas industry:** to act responsibly; in local community's best interests; and trust in their capability
- **Relationship quality:** perceptions of the likely relationship between the gas industry and community
- **Procedural fairness:** perceptions of how fairly the gas industry will treat the community
- **Governance:** perceptions of formal governance (regulations and compliance), government engaging with and working collaboratively with communities, and trust in state departments
- **Knowledge:** awareness and understanding of the onshore conventional gas industry.



Drilling rig operation in the Otway Basin

People were more concerned about the long-term future issues of conventional gas development than about more immediate impacts.

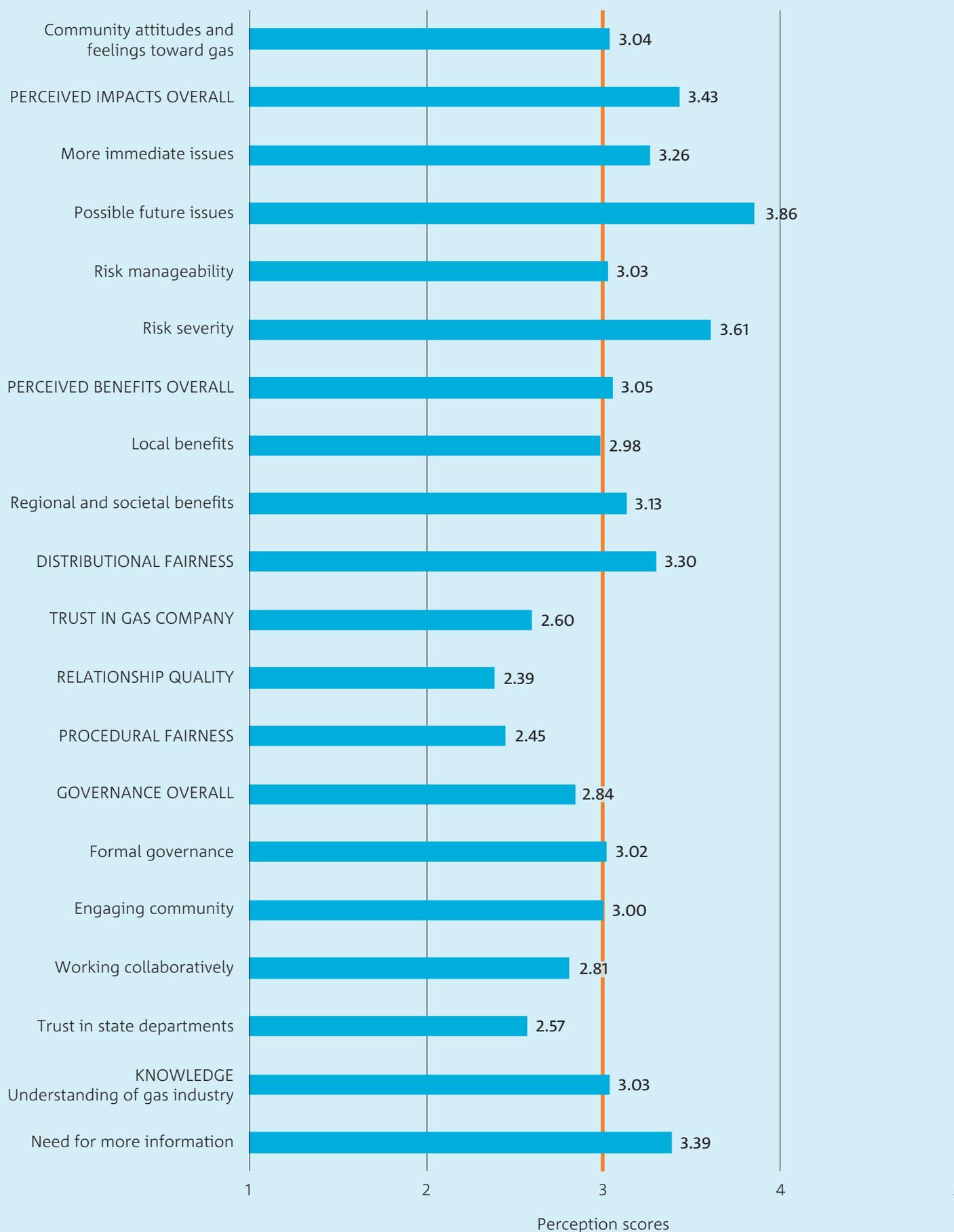
The issues of highest concern to participants were fracking being introduced after the moratorium and unconventional gas development being introduced over time, both of higher concern than impacts to water.

Local communities did not perceive the benefits of conventional gas development to be very high. This applied to both local benefits and wider regional and state-wide benefits that the industry may bring.



Blue Lake, Mt Gambier, inspiringsa.org.au

Perceptions about conventional gas development: Underlying drivers for the lower south east region of South Australia



Note: Scores: 1 = lowest and 5 = highest perception; scores < 3 indicate unfavourable perceptions except perceived impacts where the higher the score the greater the concern

A framework to explain social acceptance of conventional gas development

Statistical modelling of the eight key factors contributing to people's trust and social acceptance showed how the different underlying factors work together to shape people's overall attitude or level of acceptance (or not) towards conventional gas development. It also showed that:

- Perceptions of impacts and benefits directly influence people's acceptance, but also indirectly influence their trust in the industry and how fairly they believe costs and benefits will be shared (distributional fairness)
- Trust in the industry was largely determined by the perceived quality of relationships industry have with community and the procedural fairness by which they treat their community
- Good governance of the industry supports relational aspects between communities and the gas companies and people's beliefs about distributional fairness
- The influence of knowledge is not straightforward as both residents rejecting and supporting conventional gas development can be confident in their industry knowledge.

The model (below) demonstrates that people's trust and acceptance of the industry is dependent on a range of factors and pathways.

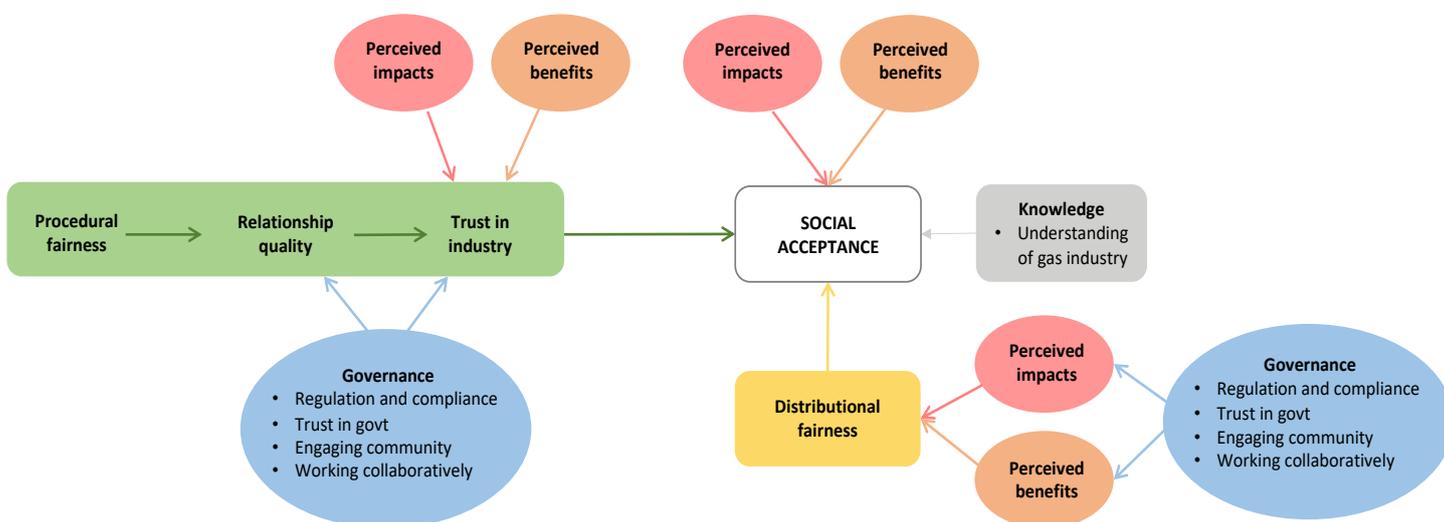
Using these pathways, each factor needs to be addressed and improved in order to improve people's trust in industry and acceptance of conventional gas development in their communities.



A conventional gas well drilling operation



A conventional gas well head



CSIRO framework for social acceptance of onshore conventional gas development in south east South Australia

More information: [Find out more about the full report and this project](#) | [Read about other GISERA research in South Australia](#)

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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