



SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS

GISERA | Gas Industry Social and Environmental Research Alliance

# Community wellbeing and attitudes to coal seam gas development in 2022, in Narrabri Shire, NSW

Monitoring changes in community wellbeing and local attitudes to coal seam gas (CSG) development in the Narrabri Shire, NSW, between 2017 and 2022

The Narrabri Gas Project (NGP) is a CSG development in the north-west of NSW that has been approved but is yet to enter a construction phase. There is a need to monitor and gain a greater understanding about the local community's attitudes towards the NGP, and the sense of community wellbeing.

CSIRO led this survey, carried out in mid-2022, under its Gas Industry Social and Environmental Research Alliance (GISERA).

## Key points

- The Narrabri Gas Project (NGP) is a CSG project with state and federal government approvals. Santos, the proponent, is yet to start construction of the NGP.
- There is a need for a greater understanding about community wellbeing, and attitudes towards CSG.
- CSIRO researchers undertook a survey in 2022, using the same survey design as the 2017 baseline survey.
- The survey found that overall community wellbeing remained robust; attitudes to CSG development were more positive; and residents became more confident in their knowledge about the local CSG industry, though still needed more information.
- The survey results provide useful information for the local community, industry, and government for planning, and to enhance local community wellbeing.
- If the NGP goes ahead, GISERA researchers will continue monitoring community wellbeing and attitudes to local CSG development in the future.

## Research objectives

The aim of this study is to provide useful information for the local community, industry, and government for planning, and to enhance local community wellbeing. This study can also help to address the concerns and expectations of CSG development in the Narrabri Shire.

The study monitored changes in both community wellbeing and local attitudes to CSG development in the broader Narrabri Shire between 2017 and 2022. It builds on previous research: GISERA carried out an initial baseline survey in 2017 (before the NGP was approved).

## The Narrabri Gas Project

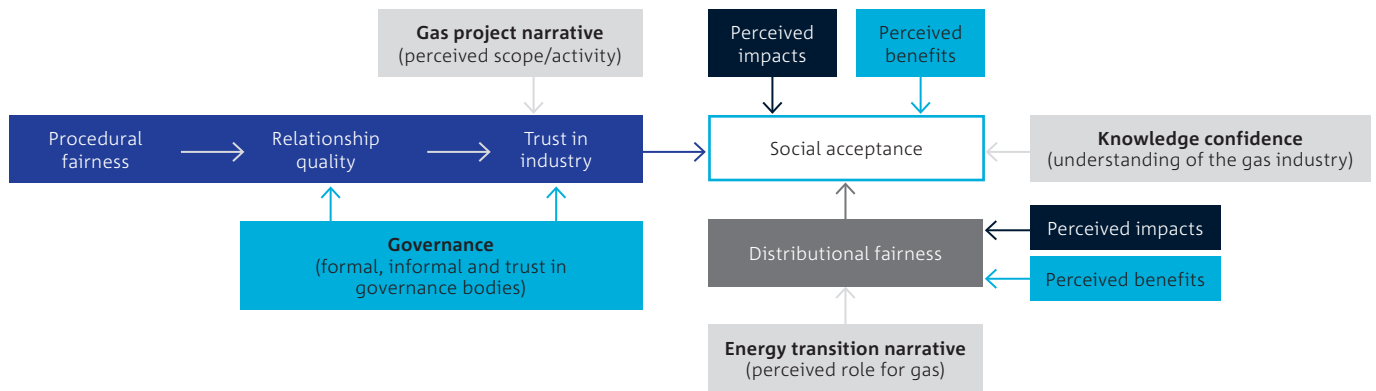
The Narrabri Shire is located in NSW, in the Gunnedah Basin, approximately halfway between Brisbane and Sydney, and 300km inland from the coast.

In 2020, the NSW Government approved the NGP - a CSG proposal to develop up to 850 wells on 425 well pads over 20 years, located about 20km south of Narrabri.

In 2021, the Federal Government approved the project; the proponent, Santos, was granted approval to extract CSG from the Narrabri region.

In mid-2022, at the time of data collection for this study, the NGP was still in an appraisal phase by Santos, pending a final investment decision.





CSIRO researchers have developed a model of social acceptance.

## How was the research conducted?

The 2022 research used the same survey design as 2017. CSIRO researchers conducted a telephone survey of 304 randomly-selected residents (aged 18 years and over) of the Narrabri Shire between June and August 2022. The sample was representative; however, researchers also weighted the sample so that it reflected the 2022 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) population census characteristics on age, gender, subregions, and whether living in- or out-of-town. All results are reported using the weighted sample.

The survey participants were all residents of the Narrabri Shire. The main town centre in the shire is Narrabri, with Wee Waa and Boggabri the next two biggest towns. Residents were sampled in both in-town (52%) and the surrounding areas out-of-town (48%). Two-thirds (67%) of the survey sample was from Narrabri and surrounds.

Of those invited to participate in this telephone survey, nearly half of residents contacted (44%) agreed to participate.

Survey participants were asked over 200 questions. The survey took about 30 minutes and had two parts:

- One part measured perceptions of local community wellbeing (e.g., their thoughts on community cohesion, trust and spirit, the town's appearance, roads, social interaction, health, environmental management, services, etc).
- The second part measured attitudes and perceptions of CSG development in the Shire (e.g., perceived impacts and risks, perceived benefits, distributational fairness, trust in CSG company, the role of gas in energy transition, social acceptance, etc.).

### More information

Read the [2022 final report](#) | [2017 final report](#)

Read about other [GISERA projects in NSW here](#)

## What did the research find?

There were four main findings from the 2022 survey:

1. Overall community wellbeing was robust and stable in the Shire between 2017 and 2022.
  - On the whole, community wellbeing was rated highly, at an average of 4.0 out of 5 in both years.
  - Some wellbeing dimensions decreased compared to 2017 (e.g., the satisfaction with roads, local schools and community support services).
  - Some dimensions improved, though mainly around Narrabri and surrounds (e.g., the importance and satisfaction with economic opportunities, particularly for men).
2. Overall social acceptance of CSG development increased in the shire, between 2017 and 2022.
  - Attitudes towards CSG development became more positive from 2017 to 2022, though social acceptance was still modest, on average.
  - In 2022, housing affordability and rental prices were the leading concern about CSG development, followed closely by concerns about water contamination and depletion. (In 2017, concerns about water depletion and contamination were higher.)
  - The key driver of social acceptance was trust in the CSG company, underpinned by procedural fairness, quality relationships, and good governance.
  - Looking to the future, there was still concern that hydraulic fracturing may be introduced over time, as well as concerns with CSG well integrity over time.
3. Both perceptions of community wellbeing and social licence factors differed between Narrabri and surrounds compared to the rest of the shire, both being more favourable around Narrabri.
4. Residents' confidence in their knowledge about the local CSG industry improved, though more information and ongoing updates are needed.

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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, greenhouse gas emissions, 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.