

COUNCILLOR ALED HOGGETT

COUNCILLOR ON GLOUCESTER SHIRE COUNCIL



MEDIA RELEASE

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AGL AND GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION A FARCE

I am a Councillor on Gloucester Shire Council and former Chair and present Deputy Chair of Mid Coast Water.

Since January 2014 I have been a Gloucester Council representative of the State Government sponsored Gloucester Dialogue committee (Dialogue). The Dialogue, which is chaired by the NSW Land and Water Commissioner Jock Laurie, was established at my suggestion and with Council endorsement. It was an attempt to give AGL and the State Government the opportunity to properly consult with the Gloucester Community in relation to its Gloucester Coal Seam Gas Project (CSG). I was concerned that at that time there had been an absence of genuine community consultation.

On 28 October 2014 I resigned from the Dialogue because I have now concluded that it has failed. The Dialogue has become a means by which AGL and the State Government provide carefully selected and manicured information to the Council and the community. It has become, in effect, a monologue directed at Council. This creates an illusion of consultation where in fact none exists. The process has also been completely opaque.

In my view AGL does not have a social licence to operate its CSG field in Gloucester. Its attitude to the Dialogue has done nothing to help it earn a social licence. Quite the reverse; in fact I strongly believe that, despite an overbearing PR effort by AGL aimed at our small community, it is no closer to obtaining a social licence than it was 12 months ago.

Many of the pressing questions that our community has put to the Dialogue over the last 8 months remain unanswered. The Company and the State Government have inundated the Dialogue with one-sided technical information aimed at convincing us that there is negligible environmental risk. The Dialogue has systematically ignored the fundamental social and economic consequences that are likely to result from AGL's project.

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The Dialogue was intended to be a vehicle to develop trust and encourage open communication. Unfortunately, it seems to have achieved the exact opposite. With some crucial issues the Dialogue was given no information beforehand but was simply told after the event.

I was appalled by AGL's recent attempt to hijack the Community Stakeholder Engagement Process. This initiative had been a Council priority since the commencement of the Dialogue but attempts to progress it under a partnership approach have been continually frustrated in the Dialogue.

I was also extremely disturbed by video footage of physical aggression by AGL security people against longstanding and valued members of the Gloucester community. It is my understanding that these residents were on a public road exercising their democratic right to express their views. I cannot in all conscience associate with a company that employs people willing to use such tactics.

I know that my views are shared by several other Councillors.

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