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NSW Government changes law to fast-track CSG fracking at Gloucester

The NSW government is attempting to sneak through changes to gas drilling regulations that will hasten approvals for a coal seam gas project at Gloucester and allow fracking to start less than 400 metres from family homes, warned Lock the Gate Alliance and Groundswell Gloucester today.

Hunter regional coordinator for Lock the Gate Steve Phillips said the proposed changes to the *State Environmental Planning Policy (Mining, Petroleum Production and Extraction Industries) 2007* were quietly uploaded to the planning department's website last week. The amendments are on exhibition until July 16th.

One part of the proposed amendments appears specifically designed to allow AGL to get approval for an exploratory fracking project near Gloucester, without completing a full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

"This amendment appears quite innocuous at first glance but careful examination reveals it will clear the way for AGL to begin fracking at Gloucester without completing a full EIS," Mr Phillips said. "That appears to be the sole purpose of this particular amendment."

"AGL are seeking approval to conduct exploratory fracking at four gas wells next to family homes in Gloucester", said John Watts, spokesperson for Groundswell Gloucester. "We wrote to the government months ago pointing out that under current regulations, a full EIS is required due to the proximity of other gas wells to the proposed fracking project. We had no response from the Government on this matter until this week – when they announced their intention to change the law for AGL's benefit."

"The proposed amendments will allow the Government to give AGL the green light for this project without completing a full EIS. How can the NSW Government allow AGL to conduct fracking operations so close to family homes, without even making them do a proper environment study?", asked Mr Watts.

"This is the latest example of the state government bending to the demands of the coal and gas industries at the expense of the public interest," said Phillips.

"The changes don't need to go to parliament and could be put into planning regulations with little public scrutiny. This is not open and transparent government.

"Lock the Gate calls on the government to abandon its continual backdoor attempts to bring in policies that only benefit mining interests and instead to uphold the public's right to full disclosure and full environmental assessment of high risk projects."

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