Eco-conditions set for projects

BY KARL FRANZEN

The Federal Government’s approval of three gas projects in Queensland has brought mixed responses.

Minister for Sustainability Tony Burke said he had imposed strict environmental conditions on two coal seam gas projects at Gladstone, and the dredging of Gladstone Port’s western basin but environmental groups believe they will not be enough.

The CSG projects are the Gladstone Liquified Natural Gas (GLNG) joint venture between Santos, Malaysia’s Petronas and France’s Total and and BG Group’s Queensland Curtis LNG.

With a combined cost of around $3 billion, the two projects will produce almost 16 million tonnes of LNG a year and will require vast amounts of development.

“After rigorous assessments... I consider that these projects can go ahead without unacceptable impacts on matters protected under national environment law,” Mr Burke said.

“While there are significant economic benefits to these projects, which must be a consideration in my decision, my focus has been on protecting environmental matters such as protected species and ecological communities. More than 300 conditions have been placed on each of Santos and Queensland Gas Company’s coal seam gas projects to help protect groundwater-dependent species and minimise other environmental impacts.

“I have received expert advice from my Department and Geoscience Australia on the groundwater issues related to coal seam gas activity,” Mr Burke said.

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“The need for 300 conditions on these two projects is telling, as is the Minister’s indication there is still a possibility of groundwater depletion,” she said.

“Coal seam gas mining should not proceed if there is any chance that it will threaten the Great Artesian Basin which supplies groundwater to the rich farmland of the Downs.

“ Coal seam gas is a climate furring, being almost as greenhouse gas intensive as coal once extraction, transport and liquefaction is factored in. It is a risky distraction from investment in genuine clean renewable energy that does not threaten food producing land.”

Model sought for future of tight gas

BY KAMI RAMINI

A new scientific research group to investigate and establish a model for future successful tight gas exploration projects in Western Australia has been set up and studies are already underway.

The group consists of researchers from Curtin University, University of Western Australia and CSIRO and is led by Curtin University department of petroleum engineering’s Professor Reza Rezaee.

The research group will work in partnership with unlisted company, Whitcher Range Energy, to study the tight gas sand field at its exploration permit in the South Perth Basin.

Professor Rezaee said that as times and trends change, tight gas and shale gas is being more and more considered as a potentially valuable resource.

“Although historically it has been too difficult and uneconomical to produce, as energy prices rise, and a shift from coal to gas energy sources is experienced, tight gas and shale gas is now being viewed as a resource with great potential,” he said.

Tight gas is considered an unconventional gas resource, along with coal seam gas, shale gas and basin-centred gas.

Professor Rezaee and his team aim to identify a solution for the production of tight gas in the South Perth Basin and to use that eventual solution as a model for the exploration of other tight gas fields in WA.

Professor Rezaee said tight gas has been difficult to produce on a commercial scale due to the lack of permeability plus formation damage in the sandstone reservoir, which means the gas is locked tight underground, making it difficult to drill a profitable well.

UWA in major funds win to study oil rig stability

The stability of oil rigs on the north west shelf is among some of the research projects flagged to receive a big financial boost from the Australian Research Council (ARC).

Researchers at The University of Western Australia have secured almost $19 million in grants from ARC, and another $10.4 million has been pledged by national and international organisations to support a number of specific research projects.

Also in the national ARC funding, 12 UWA academics and postdoctoral researchers won individual fellowships to support their work.

The UWA research projects include four dimensional mapping of mineral deposits, Indian Ocean climate change though investigations on Ningaloo Reef, astrophysics and gravitational wave research, studies of memory and cognition, plant and animal biology and artificial intelligence and image processing for defence and security, as well as ensuring oil rig stability.

The funding for ARC Discovery Projects, ARC Linkage Grants and ARC Fellowships - were announced in Canberra by the Federal Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, Senator Kim Carr.

UWA’s deputy vice-chancellor (Research), Professor Rohyn Owens said that the grants to UWA represented around 67 per cent of all federal research funding coming to Western Australia.

“UWA’s research strengths in supporting the energy and minerals industries, the defence of the nation, evolutionary biology, climate science and agriculture have all been recognised,” said Professor Owens.

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