

## Coal Seam Gas

Coal seam gas is a topical issue in Victoria. This fact sheet helps explain the role that Southern Rural Water would play in any coal seam gas mining application in our region.

### **Southern Rural Water**

Among our roles, Southern Rural Water (SRW) is responsible for:

- issuing licences to construct bores (a works licence)
- licensing and monitoring anyone taking and using groundwater for commercial purposes (a take and use licence)
- assessing applications for licence transfers

Our area of responsibility for groundwater is about 37% of Victoria – everywhere south of the Great Dividing Range.

### **How does that role relate to coal seam gas applications?**

Mineral exploration bores (not for the purposes of taking and using or investigating groundwater) are regulated by the Department of Primary Industries, not by Southern Rural Water.

If a mineral exploration company in our region plans to de-water a mine, or use groundwater for coal seam gas production they must apply to Southern Rural Water for a take and use licence. If they plan to inject substances below the ground surface they must apply for an approval from Southern Rural Water.

In many areas of Victoria, groundwater is capped. In those areas, anyone wanting a take and use licence must find someone willing to sell their existing licence, and apply to us for a transfer.

### **What would an application process involve?**

Southern Rural Water is delegated by the Minister for Water to assess applications to take and use groundwater, and applications to transfer licences.

The Water Act 1989 requires us to consider a range of factors including availability of water, existing and potential uses of groundwater, and policies of the state government. These policies include things such as the State Environment Protection Policies (SEPPs,) and environment and planning legislation. We deal with many issues, including these policies, by referral to relevant agencies.

Our assessment process usually involves public consultation, including advertising and open houses or public meetings where necessary. Partner agencies such as catchment management authorities also provide input on applications for licences.

In any application, the onus is on the proponent to demonstrate impacts are manageable and acceptable. We are cautious about approvals and conditions where there are significant risks and consequences.

If Southern Rural Water decides to issue a licence, we will usually do so with conditions, such as monitoring and limitations to prevent damage to aquifers.

Anyone who does not agree with a licence decision by Southern Rural Water can appeal to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT).

## How does SRW protect groundwater?

SRW has been actively improving our understanding of groundwater. We are the first jurisdiction of our type in Australia to produce 3D mapping of groundwater. We are now producing groundwater atlases to better inform the community of the distribution of groundwater, licences and the characteristics of each aquifer.

Despite this work, there remain areas where our knowledge of groundwater is limited. In these areas, we apply a precautionary approach to its management which has been tested and supported at VCAT.

Where licences are issued, we protect groundwater quality through licence conditions. These are complemented by the SEPPs, which may require cleanup by and/or penalties for polluters.

## Has SRW issued any licences relating to coal seam gas?

There has only been one coal seam gas development in southern Victoria that has proceeded past exploration. In this instance, licences were required to construct bores, and to take and use water. A typical approval, referral and notification process applied. There was no injection or fracking involved. This development has not entered into a production stage.

## What is not in SRW's jurisdiction?

Southern Rural Water does not issue mining or exploration licences.

Questions to do with mining practices and operations should be referred to the Department of Primary Industries.

## How can I find out more about groundwater?

Southern Rural Water's website has resources such as fact sheets, 3D maps and groundwater atlases that explain groundwater.

## More information

For more information contact us on **1300 139 510** or visit [www.srw.com.au](http://www.srw.com.au).