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High Levels of Heavy Metals Found in Metgasco Wastewater

Lock the Gate Northern Rivers has today revealed that a sample of wastewater from a Metgasco coal seam gas wastewater storage pond has been found to contain high levels of a range of heavy metals toxic to humans and wildlife. The sample was analysed at the NATA accredited EAL laboratory in Lismore (sample results and comparison with Drinking Water and ANZECC Environmental Guidelines attached).

This finding follows on from repeated claims by Metgasco that their CSG produced water is just 'salty' and the release of company data last week suggesting that, apart from the salt levels, the water meets drinking water standards.

'These pond sample results confirm that there are indeed a range of toxic substances in addition to salts in the wastewater produced in Metgasco's coal seam gas operations and stored in ponds around Casino,' said Boudicca Cerese, spokesperson for Lock the Gate Northern Rivers.

'The tests found 13 elements present in the sample at levels above the Drinking Water Standards, the majority of them heavy metals. Ten of these substances were also above the allowable limits for maintenance of healthy freshwater ecosystems.'

'Many of these substances are well known for their toxicity and their release into local waterways via the sewage treatment plant or onto agricultural lands poses a serious threat to humans, domestic stock and wildlife.'

'Aluminium, a neurotoxic linked with the onset of dementia and Alzheimers, was detected at 440 times drinking water standards and 800 times the allowable environmental limits. At elevated concentrations aluminium can be lethal to fish and other aquatic organisms and the animals that consume them,' said Ms. Cerese.

'Lead, a cumulative poison that can severely affect the central nervous system, was measured at 7 times drinking water standards and 20 times the safe environmental limit. Lead is renowned for its effects on children's development and has been shown to cause cancer in animals.'

'The sampling found levels of hexavalent chromium 50 times the guideline level required to protect waterways. Hexavalent chromium is known to cause lung cancer in humans and also adversely affects aquatic and marine life,' she said.

'The sample results clearly show that the community cannot rely on the water quality results provided by Metgasco and that there is an urgent need for state government authorities to undertake rigorous independent testing of all Metgasco's ponds prior to any further actions regarding treatment and disposal of this wastewater,' said Ms. Cerese.

'In addition, these results sound a warning bell for the future, as the treatment and disposal of the vast quantities of water extracted in future CSG production will mean the accumulation of thousands of tonnes of chemical laden salts, potentially severely impacting ground and surface water quality, and putting at risk public, livestock and wildlife health.

'Plans to use this water in agriculture or to reinject produced water back into the ground are a dangerous notion, one which will backfire on future generations,' she said.