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MEDIA RELEASE

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Small steps

Northern Rivers Guardians spokesperson Michael McNamara has welcomed the state government's announcement of a "desk audit" of all existing coal seam gas exploration licences announced by Special Minister of State Chris Hartcher.

"The government has, since being elected in March, taken some small steps to address community concerns about coal seam gas mining" he said.

"The steps have been very small but heading in the right direction"

"It is as if they can hear individual words from outside the room but can't hear the whole sentence"

Mr McNamara called on the government to implement a full moratorium on all coal seam gas exploration and mining, not just new applications, until and unless all concerns are addressed. These concerns include industry impacts, community health, environmental impact, land use conflicts and priorities and community involvement in decision making.

"The final decision about whether this technology is allowed to proceed should rest with the community" he said "not with anonymous bureaucrats in Sydney".

"The final decision about whether or not this technology is allowed to proceed should be dependent on addressing the legitimate concerns raised by communities around the state" he said.

"The government's 60-day freeze on new applications is about to expire but our concerns are yet to be addressed in any meaningful way" Mr McNamara said.

"The government imposed freeze is merely an administrative arrangement to allow a 'clearing of the decks' while they move to a new system of assessment"

"The new system of assessment does not include sufficient and necessary measures to safeguard environmental or community interests or those of agriculture and other affected industries"

"For example, an agricultural impact assessment is only required when a company applies for a production licence, not at the exploration phase"

"An organic farm with even one exploration well may find that its organic certification and hence its business is at risk"

"There is no requirement in the state government's new regime for an assessment of the impact of mining on other affected industries such as tourism"

"We call on the government to halt all coal seam gas exploration and mining until and unless community concerns have been addressed and the process is proven safe by independent research and assessment".