



Friday, 25 November 2011

New ABC website on CSG: Embarrassing factual errors to be subject of formal complaint

A new ABC website, based on what is being referred to as "data journalism", is riddled with factual errors and will today be referred to ABC Managing Director Mark Scott for immediate investigation.

The Australian Petroleum Production & Exploration Association (APPEA) is seeking clarification regarding how the site *Coal Seam Gas: By the Numbers* (created by the ABC Radio Multiplatform & Content Development Unit) could have been launched without the proper checking of facts, calculations, or claims made.

APPEA's Chief Operating Officer – Eastern Australia, Rick Wilkinson, said: "The ABC is held in very high esteem by the Australian public, but most observers would concede this piece of work fails to provide the objectivity, accuracy, or right of reply that is expected of quality journalism."

APPEA will examine the entire website for further factual errors but will request Mr Scott make inquiries regarding serious issues such as:

1. The website's central feature, a map of CSG wells, which contains wells that are not even CSG wells (they are conventional gas wells).
2. The map incorrectly listing many abandoned and plugged wells as being in production or proposed CSG wells.
3. The website claiming CSG companies have received approval for 40,000 wells, which is not true.
4. The website claiming that "conservative estimates suggest coal seam gas wells could draw 300 gigalitres of water from the ground each year", which is neither a conservative estimate nor correct. Nor is it based on actual industry projections.
5. The website stating that desalination and water treatment cannot remove all contaminants, which is incorrect. Desalination technology used by the CSG industry is the same as that used to produce clean drinking water across Australia.
6. The website stating that CSG water is "very salty" when in fact the water in Australia's coal seams is on average only around one tenth as salty as seawater.
7. The website's use of wrong and misleading graphics, such as the one showing a drilling rig remaining on-site during a well's gas-production stage (graphic No 4) which is clearly wrong and simply does not happen.

Mr Wilkinson said: "This misinformation from our national broadcaster is very concerning. It will take time to work through all problems associated with this site, but we will go through it carefully and methodically to ensure that the ABC corrects the record and that website viewers are not misled or misinformed about the expansion of a very important industry."

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The Australian Petroleum Production & Exploration Association represents the upstream oil and gas industry in Australia. APPEA member companies produce around 98 per cent of Australia's oil and gas.