**Narrabri and District Chamber of Commerce READ Submission to the IPC in support of Santos and the Narrabri CSG Project**

My name is Russell Stewart. I’m the President of Narrabri and District Chamber of Commerce (NDCC) (6 years) and a 30 year member. I was born and breed in the region. The Son of a local Soldier Settler.

Our Chamber has a 93 year history of supporting and representing the business and wider community of Narrabri and District. We overwhelmingly support Santos and the CSG industry in our area.

Business has been extremely hard hit by drought and is very aware that they can no longer survive and employ staff based on agriculture alone. This has been the case in our region for some time and the possibility of the establishment of the CSG industry offers much hope and stability for them for their economic survival.

* Retention of our quality young people is the absolute key to healthy growth in regional communities.
* We must be able to offer our young people quality long term varied career opportunities or they are just simply forced to leave.
* Santos has shown that they do predominantly hire and focus on local people so we are confident this will continue. Santos has been wonderful community and corporate members and very quickly became one with the Narrabri community.
* Besides Santos staff attending all Chamber meetings Chamber have hosted over 36 well attended CSG information evenings where Santos representatives answered all questions put to them without notice by attendees, members and non-members alike. These information evenings proved critical in allaying the fears put in place by the relentless scaremongering by mostly out of town anti CSG groups. The overwhelming comments by those attending were that they are pleased they attended to form their own opinion. They were now not concerned with the project and could see through the scaremongering after understanding the checkable facts.
* As President of NDCC I receive regular requests for interviews from various media and study groups. I always agree regardless of their views. However, I’m regularly concerned at the lack of knowledge of regional communities many of these people have and the already anti CSG opinion formed by them. When I ask why they have formed their anti CSG attitude they say that they have read social media reports that water is being poisoned and the environment is being ruined. I then ask if they have seen any evidence of this. They again refer me back to statements they read on social media. When asked if they have taken the time to check the accuracy of the social media statements or visit a CSG site the answer is invariably no. Unfortunately, the majority of the finished reports of these people vary little with their preconceived ideas.
* Statements made by Santos or their supporters in our area can be and will be scrutinised by all and accuracy checked. This of course should be the case. Statements and innuendo released and utilised by the anti CSG groups seem to be accepted as genuine and accurate. Those who take the time to fact check, mostly supporters or “fence sitters” ,are very disappointed and frustrated that the anti CSG lobby are not taken to task and fact checked as Santos and their supporters are and expect to be. This has been a major factor in any division which may occur.
* There has never been a genuine independent survey taken in the Narrabri region to find the actual real community support level of Santos and the proposed Narrabri gas project. The publicly quoted figure of 98% by the anti CSG groups is clearly fabricated for their purpose and is yet another example of their willingness to deceive the public on this issue. Chamber members who live work, run their business, employ local people and volunteer in the community believe the vast majority of our community are in support of this project.
* Chamber members are extremely grateful that these same activist groups and social media were not around when our wonderful agriculture industry was developed. The opinion is that the same relentless attacks would have been levelled at that industry. The result would have been devastating for our community as it will be should our Narrabri CSG project not be approved. A wonderful once in a lifetime lost opportunity for this region.
* As President of NDCC I regularly receive enquiries from outside business very interested in developing in our district should the Narrabri CSG project be approved. These enquiries are genuine and very exciting for the healthy growth of our part of regional Australia. There are numerous businesses just waiting for the approval of this project to be approved so that they can invest their money and efforts into our region. These entities offer the promise of quality long term career opportunities for our young people so that they can stay commit, contribute and grow this wonderful community. Chamber members do not only consist of shop front business. Our members include all forms of business and industry as well as many farmers who all support Santos and the development of the CSG industry in our area.
* After much genuine consideration of the Chief Scientists report and other independent scientific studies into the CSG industry in the Narrabri area the members of the Narrabri and District Chamber of Commerce are comfortable and convinced that the project can safely coexist with already established local industry and community. Farmer members of NDCC are in awe at the high level of construction and integrity of the Santos wells. Santos are always open, transparent and quick to respond to Chambers questions
* Narrabri and District Chamber of Commerce have the upmost confidence in the current Commission to work with the facts and approve this once in a lifetime opportunity for our region and NSW so that we can move forward with confidence to work together to guarantee healthy growth for all. The timing has never been more critical and urgent for this project to be approved.
* We thank you for this opportunity to express our long time well developed and considered opinion and respectfully urge you to approve the Santos Narrabri Gas Project.