

Reaction to \$1.7 billion QGC gasfield development ranges from caution to celebration

ABC Rural By Arlie Felton-Taylor

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PHOTO: This paddock on the Golden family property will be the site for part of QGC's Charlie development. (Supplied: Richard Golden)

The announcement of Australia's latest billion dollar coal seam gas development has cleared confusion about the future for one Queensland community.

The Queensland Gas Company (QGC) yesterday announced it would develop up to 400 coal seam gas wells in a project known as Charlie, which also will feature the construction of a large field compression station, associated pipelines and infrastructure which will feed into existing facilities.

Located 20 kilometres west of the township of Wandoan and with a footprint of 2500 hectares, QGC said the development cost was \$1.7 billion.

The latest announcement comes at a time when the resources sector is experiencing a downturn, there is a drought and cattle prices are high.

One local cattle producer said he was relieved because the future of his property was clear, for better or for worse.

Richard Golden said it had been difficult not knowing whether the expansion was going to go ahead.

"I suppose it hasn't got a date at which it's going to be finished, but at least we know now that once it starts it will be gone through until it's finished," Mr Golden said.

"And that will mean all of this, all of our holding will be developed and we hope that that will be the last development that we will have to tolerate and go through."

Mr Golden said the development would occur on part of his grazing property Potter's Flat.

MAP: Wandoan 4419

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AUDIO: Grazier Richard Golden and APPEA chief executive Dr Malcolm Roberts discuss the new CSG gasfield development at Wandoan. (ABC Rural)

"That tended to leave us playing a waiting game with what we should or shouldn't do in terms of livestock numbers, because we still have a substantial amount of our country that's going to be heavily affected by the construction of this stage two of the Charlie development," he said.

"We didn't know what the resources price slowdown was going to do, and the QGC staff that we dealt with were really open and honest and said that they really weren't sure either, and their best guess was probably between six months and two years."

Gasfield expected to create 1600 jobs

QGC said in a release the Charlie development was expected to create 1600 jobs in its construction phase.

The company has since been unavailable for comment.

The announcement was made the same day the Australia Institute released a discussion paper about the impacts of mining and gas projects on local economies.

The public policy think tank said Queensland's coal seam gas industry was an example of how economic benefits promised by mining companies did not always eventuate.

Mr Golden said while negotiations had been tough, he had struck a 'make good' arrangement with QGC.

"We already have turned the make good agreement into a replacement bore," he said.

"We probably had a few clear cut things in ours which made it more definite that we would be in a position to end up with a doable make good agreement, but it took a long time. It was the best part of three years."

The country that's going to be purchased by resources companies has already been purchased. The impact on local families has probably already been felt.

Richard Golden, cattle producer

Communities say CSG sector over promised, under delivered

The sentiment in many communities involved in the rapid development of CSG in the Surat Basin is that the sector over promised and under delivered in terms of community benefits.

Mr Golden said the newest development would be no exception.

"The damage is already done in terms of the damage that these sorts of things do," he said.

"The country that's going to be purchased by resources companies has already been purchased. The impact on local families has probably already been felt.

"Probably its biggest effect will be that it will once again be the traffic. It will ramp up the road damage and there will once again be safety issues. It'll once again crank up the age-old problems of gates being left open."

The Wandoan grazier conceded there were some benefits in improvement to roads, sealing some sections and providing all-weather access, plus in some cases there would be better mobile coverage with towers installed by the gas companies.

The gas industry's peak group, the Australian Petroleum Production and Exploration Association (APPEA), said the new development was great news.

Peak body welcomes development

APPEA chief executive Dr Malcolm Roberts said he welcomed the announcement.

"This is phenomenally good news for Queensland and is confirmation that having had the three Queensland projects built in Gladstone, there's an ongoing benefit to Queensland that will last literally for 40 years."

Dr Roberts said the industry was very respectful of the rights of landholders, and knew the long term success of the sector was dependent on the support of those farmers and the broader community.

However, APPEA has taken issue with the Australia Institute's paper and its view the industry has not brought substantive economic benefits for Queensland.

"It's not surprising the Australia Institute should make such fairly flimsy claims," Dr Roberts said.

"They have a very clear agenda to oppose fossil fuel development in any form."

Topics: rural, agribusiness, beef-cattle, mining-rural, mining-industry, oil-and-gas, livestock, agricultural-crops, wandoan-4419

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