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The Hon Peter Garrett AM, MP
Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra
ACT 2600

21st July 2008

Dear Minister,

Re: Coal Seam Methane Gas Exploration in the Wollombi Valley

As Chairman of the WAGE action group, I wish to bring your attention to the fact that a consortium of Sydney Gas Limited and AGL Energy hold Petroleum Exploration Licences to explore for coal seam methane gas across a significant area of the Sydney Basin including the Wollombi Valley.

Listed by the National Trust in 1977 as a landscape conservation area, the Wollombi Valley lays just north of Sydney at the southern end of the Lower Hunter Valley. Consisting of farming land set in narrow river valleys between Yengo National Park and the Watagan Mountains, the Wollombi Valley is home to all manner of native flora and fauna. The name Wollombi is an aboriginal word meaning 'The Meeting Place of the Waters' as there are many local tributaries feeding the Wollombi Brook. The associated aquifers are a critical source of water for the local population.

Reached via the convict built Old North Road, the two local villages of Wollombi and Laguna retain important heritage value. Some of the local families have been here since the earliest days of the Colony. Tourists coming through the valley in significant numbers to relax and enjoy its beauty are critical to the feasibility of most local businesses.

Sydney Gas have confirmed to us that if they find a coal seam methane gas field here in the Wollombi Valley and it were to prove economic for production, they anticipate there would eventually be installed as many as 200 well heads as well as a very large compressor station together with all the associated pipelines. Large amounts of water would be removed by road tanker from each wellhead, possibly involving hundreds of such vehicle movements each week.

Wollombi Valley Against Gas Extraction
c/- General Store, Wollombi NSW 2325
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Coal Seam Methane (CSM) extraction presents significant risks to this environment. It is well documented that CSM operations have caused catastrophic damage to the environment and watercourses both here in Australia and overseas. The infrastructure and heavy traffic movements associated with methane gas extraction would cause irreparable damage to the character and environment of the Wollombi Valley, the fabric of its community and cultural history.

We ask you to acknowledge the threat the Wollombi Valley now faces and support our effort to stop this development proceeding.

Please accept our invitation for you to attend and/or speak at a public meeting we will be holding at Laguna from 10.00am on the 9th August 2008.

Please contact me at any time to discuss the matter.

Yours sincerely,

Sean Gough

cc. Senator the Hon Penny Wong, Minister for Climate Change and Water
Hon Martin Ferguson AM, MP, Minister for Resources and Energy;
Minister for Tourism