

Title:

Measuring cumulative socio-economic impacts of Coal Seam Gas projects in the Western Downs: Building the case for a strategic monitoring framework.

Author: Lara Mottee (Presenter), Kathy Witt, Jo-Anne Everingham, and Will Rifkin

Organisation: Kellogg, Brown and Root Pty Ltd
University of Queensland, Sustainable Minerals Institute,
Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining

Country: Australia

Email: lara.mottee@kbr.com

Abstract:

The rapid growth of resource development in rural Queensland and a global interest in the 'social license to operate' has seen mining, oil and gas companies, and the state government place increased emphasis upon managing the needs of communities in the planning approval process. For the resource sector, the approval process can require that Environmental Impact Statements (EIS)s include a social impact assessment (SIA) and community consultation to characterize socio-economic impacts and benefits for affected areas. The SIA can also be required to specify an impact mitigation and management plan.

But how effective is the current SIA analysis and review process for a single project when a number of resource or construction projects are occurring in the same region? To what extent does a pre-project SIA match analysis of cumulative, post-project outcomes? To improve prediction, quantification, and management of cumulative impacts, what approaches can enhance the ability of practitioners, authorities, and project proponents?

To address this question, researchers at the University of Queensland's Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining (CSRMI) have been studying the cumulative socio-economic impacts of coal seam gas (CSG) projects in the Western Downs region of Queensland. The research team has selected a compact set of indicators, through a participatory process, to enable monitoring changes in affected communities.

The social and economic impacts detected via this set of indicators, and associated stakeholder interviews, are compared in this paper with the impacts forecast during the approval process. The analysis of trends in the indicators underline (1) the need for a focus on assessing cumulative impacts at the town level and (2) the importance of independent coordination across impact assessment studies in a region contributing to an overarching monitoring framework.