

QUESTION ON NOTICE

No. 1027

asked on Tuesday, 8 June 2010

MR HOPPER ASKED THE MINISTER FOR NATURAL RESOURCES, MINES AND ENERGY AND MINISTER FOR TRADE (MR ROBERTSON)—

QUESTION:

Will the Minister advise the minimum legal proximity of gas wells to (a) residential dwellings, (b) schools, (c) school bus stops and (d) coal seam gas work camps?

ANSWER:

The *Petroleum and Gas (Production and Safety) Act 2004* (the P&G Act) requires companies to develop and implement safety management plans in relation to all coal seam gas activities. In developing these safety management plans companies undertake a risk based assessment process that identifies all potential hazards and consequences associated with the safe operation of gas wells. Appropriate strategies and control measures are then put in place so as to reduce the level of residual risk to workers and the community to as low as reasonably practical.

An example of a risk assessment process is detailed in the Australian Standard for gas pipelines which includes a full hazard and operability study (or HAZOP study) in which special provisions for high consequence areas such as residential and sensitive locations must be considered and evaluated.

High pressure gas pipelines do pass through cities and there are extensive reticulated gas systems right across Australia going into hundreds of thousands of houses, hospitals and schools to provide for gas cooking and hot water. Controls on the design, maintenance and operation of these systems minimise the risks of leakage and any incidents. If any leak does occur natural gas being lighter than air disperses rapidly into the atmosphere.

The Petroleum and Gas Inspectorate will continue to conduct random gas well inspections to closely monitor this situation. To facilitate this activity the government has announced in this year's budget that it has invested \$14.6m over four years in additional funding for the Petroleum and Gas Inspectorate including nine new Petroleum and Gas Inspectors.