



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **Deans of Agriculture and Council of Environmental Deans and Directors**

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#### **Coal seam debate reveals deeper policy flaws**

Current controversies over coal seam gas point to deeper problems in how Australia plans the use of natural resources, according to two peak university bodies.

The Council of Environmental Deans and Directors (ACEDD) and the Australian Council of Deans of Agriculture (ACDA) met in Canberra last week, and discussed ways to improve policy making affecting Australia's natural resources and environment. The two bodies between them represent departments at 36 universities.

They claim that Australia needs to hold decisions in much more sophisticated and forward thinking ways.

“Coal seam gas is the current argument, but the underlying issue is short-term, fragmented approaches to decision making, lacking a sufficient scientific basis and not engaging the public in balanced, informed debates” said Professor Rick Roush, President of ACDA.

“Undertaking assessment and approvals processes in less than transparent ways, one project at a time, without strong and shared data on benefits and impacts, can only lead to divisive, unconstructive debates.”

Both Councils agreed that these problems are not confined to the CSG debate, but to other major national policy issues including coastal development, urban and peri-urban growth and non-urban land use planning.

Notably, CSG involves a rapidly proliferating class of developments with trade-offs between food security, waste disposal, water resources, biodiversity, employment and social well-being, and demand lengthy and comprehensive planning processes.

The Councils called for an improved approach to planning and approvals

processes that take a wider and longer view of major development sectors.

The essential elements of such an approach need to be a strategic view that takes account of the cumulative impacts of many developments, and the integration of environmental, social and economic aspects.

A precautionary and evidence-based approach is also needed, with sufficient quality scientific understanding built up before single major developments are approved, or multiple smaller developments that together can have major social and environmental impacts. Policy needs to be mindful of closing off options for future generations of Australians.

“The problems we now face are the result of unplanned, multiple decisions and actions in the past – we are now capable of doing better than that, through existing strategic assessment powers” said Professor Roush.

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