



Barry O'Farrell MP Premier of NSW Minister for Western Sydney

MEDIA RELEASE

Wednesday 17 July 2013

STRENGTHENING LANDHOLDER RIGHTS

NSW Premier Barry O'Farrell today announced a strengthening of laws to give landholders a right to legal representation during arbitration.

"The NSW Liberals & Nationals Government remains committed to delivering robust enforcement and compliance legislation for landholders and farmers across NSW," Mr O'Farrell said at the opening of the NSW Farmers Annual Conference in Sydney.

"While the current legislation only allows a legal practitioner to represent a party during arbitration if both parties agree, we are creating a more level playing field so that if landholders choose to have legal representation then the licence holder cannot object.

"Similarly, if landholders choose to forego legal representation then licence holders must also forego representation. These changes will be added to the legislative package currently before Parliament.

"The very intent of this legislation is to ensure landholders have stronger and more comprehensive rights with respect to the development of a domestic gas industry.

"Companies will now have to pay reasonable legal fees for the entire negotiation period, not just at the beginning of it. While costs of representation at arbitration will continue to be borne by each party, companies will have to cover the cost of the arbitrator.

"If there is evidence companies are not acting in a fair and reasonable manner at any stage of the negotiating process, the Office of Coal Seam Gas will be asked to step in and investigate.

"NSW Land and Water Commissioner Jock Laurie is continuing productive discussions with landholder representatives and the NSW Government is hopeful many of the concerns raised with the legislation may be addressed and clarified.

"We will not be proceeding with this package of amendments unless broad consensus can be reached amongst key stakeholders," Mr O'Farrell said.

The NSW Government has agreed to undertake a review of the current laws relating to natural gas exploration with a specific focus on ensuring water testing results are made available to landholders and live results are published in real time on the Department's website.

Mr O'Farrell also announced today that NSW will sign up for the Federal Government's Farm Finance Package meaning concessional loans of up to \$650 000 could be available by the end of this month.

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