Coal seam gas: less carbon and more jobs

We must be open with the community, writes
Robbert De Weijer.

NATURAL gas from coal can be developed responsibly and sustainably. It will deliver substantial benefits to NSW and local communities. It poses little risk to local water supplies.

The responsible development of natural coal seam gas will ease future increases in the cost of energy, which appear inevitable with NSW gas consumption projected to treble by 2030, and long-term gas supply contracts from South Australia and Victoria are starting to expire in two years – NSW imports more than 90 per cent of its gas.

Dart Energy is investing heavily in NSW’s energy future and its natural gas production will help relieve these looming pressures which threaten to undermine the reliability of gas supply to local companies and families.

Coal seam gas is energy-efficient and produces significantly less carbon than coal-fired power, which will mean a positive environmental outcome for NSW. At the same time, the economic boost to the state from significant royalties and taxes paid by the industry could be reinvested in upgrades to local services and infrastructure.

A coal seam gas industry will create many jobs for locals. We expect our agreement to supply gas to the proposed Maria’s Farm Veggie glasshouse project in Fullerton Cove will create 125 jobs in the short term and more than 200 jobs into the future. We also expect a boost to local businesses. The importance of this is sadly underlined by the recent announcement of Norsk Hydro’s plan to close its aluminium plant in the Hunter Valley.

Dart Energy recently received regulatory approval for a two-well pilot project at Fullerton Cove, near Newcastle, after an extensive environmental review by Federal and state regulatory bodies, including the New Federal Independent Expert Scientific Committee.

This project will enable Dart to identify the extent of gas reserves in the area. Importantly, the project poses no risk to local water supplies, as Hunter Water has confirmed. The coal seams being targeted are more than 300m beneath the local aquifer and are in impermeable rock.

The project will use advanced horizontal drilling technologies, eliminating any need for hydraulic fracturing. We do not use toxic chemicals during drilling, only water based fluids.

Dart takes community concerns about its operations seriously. Our business cannot succeed without the support of the community at large. We know we must earn our social licence to operate by being open and transparent with the community.

Apart from a large number of one-on-one sessions with local residents, Dart has held two community information sessions in Fullerton Cove. We have also established a Community Reference Group (CRG) of local stakeholders with an independent chairman.

We believe Newcastle has a great opportunity to establish a great new industry of which it can be proud, and be part of the effort to make NSW energy independent. Dart Energy is an Australian company.

Robbert de Weijer is chief executive of Dart Australia.