

# Farmers angry over Linc investigation leaks to media

Matthew Newton | 13th Feb 2017 4:08 PM



Hopeland farmer Brian Bender detailing his concerns to State Environment Minister Dr Steven Miles, Department of Environment and Heritage Protection deputy director general Dean Ellwood, and other DEHP officers.

Matthew Newton

SOME Hopeland landholders are "ropeable" that reports alleging further contamination from the Linc Energy Underground Coal Gasification trial site were leaked to the media before property owners were contacted by the department.

Brian Bender, son of the late [George Bender](#), was visited by two journalists late on Thursday afternoon who wanted to take photos of him but wouldn't tell him what the story was about.

He refused.

That night, as he was loading grain into a truck in the shed at a family property, his mother Pam came down to tell him investigators had detected hydrogen outside the 175 sq km Excavation Caution Zone (ECZ) set up by the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection in February 2015.

Mr Bender, who has two properties outside the zone, said it was "disgraceful" how the news emerged.

"I was upset, very angry," he said.

Sitting around Pam Bender's kitchen table this morning at her Hopeland property "Valencia", State Environment Minister Dr Steven Miles, along with DEHP deputy director general Dean Ellwood and two other department officers were listening as Mr Bender put it to them straight: "We needed to know before those guys, it's as simple as that".

It has been just under two years since State Environment Minister Dr Steven Miles last visited the area regarding the issue.

"We told them (at the last meeting) we wanted to hear from the department first... we said we want updates and what not," Mr Bender said.

"I haven't had any updates for a damn long time and to be told by the media there was something going on... is disgraceful."

The Chinchilla News understands that department heads are furious the reports of the alleged contamination were leaked.

Dr Miles apologised to Mr Bender "for how it's happened", insisting the department "moved as quickly as they could".

Explaining the new results, Mr Ellwood said the latest advice suggested that levels of hydrogen in the soil around Hopeland did not pose an explosive risk, rather a "flammability risk".

He also suggested the size and shape of the ECZ could change in the near future.

## JUST IN

[Bundy's dragonfruit crop is feeling the burn](#)

[Malcolm Turnbull backs renewables... on his own house](#) [37 minutes ago](#)

[Mining experiencing 'rapid growth': How you can get a job](#)

[Markets looking forward to Inflationary pressure](#) [an hour ago](#)

[Want welfare? Can you pass the Senator's test?](#) [an hour ago](#)

[Trump's awkward handshake moment with Canadian PM](#) [an hour ago](#)

Mr Bender raised a number of concerns during the half hour meeting, including asking for a moratorium on Coal Seam Gas drilling in the ECZ, the potential impact on the local water table of rehabilitation works, the effect of the ongoing investigation on property values, and whether the government could insert a special clause into the statute of limitations legislation, specifically exempting Linc Energy, so as to cover the community in the event that the contamination worsens in the future.

No guarantees were made by the department during the meeting on any of those issues..

Mr Bender has signed onto a class action against Linc Energy and the State Government, which is being led by his mother Pam.

But the community is split on the issue and some are concerned pursuing the class action will impact property values.

"We need a law now to cover us that allows us plenty of time (to build our case) if anything comes to that point," Mr Bender said.

"I hope it doesn't come to that point, but hey, it's our future, and it's our grandchildren's future.

"If we don't do it now, whoever owns this place in 30 years' time is going to feel that we sat here and did nothing."

Responding to a question from Mr Bender, Mr Ellwood said the \$28 million rehabilitation figure quoted in media reports was for the lawful activities Linc had conducted - not the alleged unlawful contamination which was the focus of the department's investigation and the current court cases against Linc Energy and its directors.

Mr Ellwood added the government had recently provided further funding to drill bores to understand exactly the characteristics of the underground gasifiers at the Linc Energy site.

"To understand exactly where it is, how much is in it, and then continue to work on what are the options about rehabilitating those gasifiers," he said.

"It's a very methodical testing process doing that characterisation work to understand what we are dealing with and then the further steps about turning scientists minds to what are the best options to go about (rehabilitation).

"Clearly things like water allocations and water draw-downs etcetera need to be a part of that."

Dr Miles visited the Linc Energy site this afternoon, before meeting with Western Downs Regional Council mayor Paul McVeigh in Dalby.

**Surat Basin**NEWS