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ABC embarrassed again over fracking and gas coverage

As reported in *The Australian* newspaper today, the ABC has been forced to remove coverage of what it claimed was a US study linking gas drilling to health problems and the implications for the Australian gas industry.

The so-called study was littered with serious problems and should never have been considered as a scientific report.

The Australian Petroleum Production & Exploration Association's Chief Operating Officer – Eastern Australia, Rick Wilkinson, said "The fact that this research was ignored by the USA media suggests that it was seen for what it is: a piece of advocacy or activism, rather than a work of scientific endeavour.

"Given the number of formal complaints still to be resolved regarding the ABC's error-prone coverage of CSG, it is remarkable to see the ABC continue to incorrectly report on CSG issues.

"APPEA is again seeking clarification regarding why the ABC has failed to properly check facts or claims made by The Greens or other activists."

Professor Ian Rae, a University of Melbourne expert on chemicals in the environment and an advisor to the United Nations Environment Programme on chemicals in the environment, is quoted in *The Australian* as saying the study "certainly does not qualify as a scientific paper but is, rather, an advocacy piece."

Amongst a range of issues, the report and the ABC's coverage problems included:

- * The US study focused on shale gas - not CSG, as reported by the ABC - and included only anecdotal accounts from specially chosen participants, and warned of the implications of chemicals not used in Australia.
- * The report's authors describe their work as an "imperfect study" and begin a discussion of their findings with; "The most striking finding of our investigation was the difficulty in obtaining definitive information on the link between hydrocarbon gas drilling and health effects."
- * It was carried out by a veterinarian and a pharmacology professor both based in New York - rather than at the University of Massachusetts, as the ABC claimed.
- * Both authors have strong links to the anti-gas movement and are active anti-industry campaigners.

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The Australian Petroleum Production & Exploration Association represents the upstream oil and gas industry in Australia. APPEA member companies produce around 98 per cent of Australia's oil and gas.