



# Studying culture and coal seam gas disputes

18 September 2012

Anthropologists from The University of Queensland's School of Social Science are investigating coal seam gas disputes in the Darling Downs region of southern Queensland.

More specifically, Professor David Trigger and Dr Kim de Rijke will focus on issues such as sense of place, relationships to land and water, the politics of community alliances and the cultural significance of agricultural production in the Darling Downs.

Additional research for comparative purposes will be conducted in the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales.

According to Dr de Rijke, the independent study aims to engage the full variety of social groups involved in coal seam gas disputes.

"Coal seam gas extraction is currently one of the most contested issues in Australia – we're exploring the social and cultural aspects of a range of perspectives regarding these natural resource extraction projects," Dr de Rijke said.

"We intend to gain responses from farmers, environmentalists, government representatives, scientists and industry personnel, and residents in the rural towns of the Darling Downs and surrounds.

"Focused on resource contest and relationships to land in Australia, the study will address a significant issue in environmental anthropology.

"It is likely to have policy implications for Australia and other countries in which unconventional gas extraction, including the use of controversial hydraulic fracturing or 'fracking' techniques, is subject to intense disputes."

Dr de Rijke will conduct in-depth qualitative research and will look at how coal seam gas disputes can be understood in the context of competing visions of land use, nature, agricultural production and rural life.

He also seeks to understand how various forms of knowledge (including scientific expertise and knowledge based on daily experience and long-term environmental engagement) interact in the context of disputes over land and water, and how we might understand the socio-cultural aspects of risk perception as it applies to coal seam gas extraction.

Findings from the study therefore have huge potential applied significance, Dr de Rijke said.

"We hope to deliver insights pertinent to contemporary natural resource management generally, and to southern Queensland in particular," he said.

"The significance of the research lies both in its contribution to academically important issues in environmental anthropology, the potential policy implications for a specific region, and national and international debates about the social and cultural aspects of gas extraction and energy production.

"The project will also attempt to establish networks with social scientists in other departments, both at The University of Queensland and at other institutions in Australia and overseas."

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