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Appointment of land and water commissioner a step in the right direction

The Australian Petroleum Production & Exploration Association today welcomed the announcement of a land and water commissioner for NSW and a renewed focus on regional communities made by the state Government.

APPEA Chief Operating Officer Rick Wilkinson said: "The development of the NSW gas industry will bring new growth opportunities to communities previously in decline. However, such growth and change brings its share of challenges.

"A one stop shop that provides transparency and independent oversight has the potential to ease regulatory burden on all stakeholders and is a step in the right direction.

"The appointment of a commissioner is an opportunity to ensure the industry's benefits are delivered to local communities and that the challenges raised by the industry's growth, are addressed."

Mr Wilkinson said the gas industry would seek further detail on a proposed framework for regional funding while acknowledging companies already have a strong track record of supporting and contributing to the regional communities in which they operate.

"In Queensland for example the gas industry has contributed \$70 million to community organisations – from funding aeromedical rescue helicopters in the Surat Basin to refurbishing a local Country Women's Association hall and providing jumpers for the local junior rugby league sides.

"At present NSW is suffering from an image problem as an attractive place to do business. What industry and landholders need is certainty through clear and workable policy settings so NSW can address the energy shortage it currently faces."

Mr Wilkinson said the royalty holiday served an important role in encouraging investment in natural gas in NSW and its removal will mean additional costs for the industry. However, getting the framework right for the future development of these resources is far more important, and APPEA welcomes the government's commitment to the success of the industry.

Mr Wilkinson said APPEA looks forward to the release of the NSW Government's Strategic Regional Land Use Plan. He said: "Natural gas production and agriculture can co-exist. We're already seeing that to great effect in Queensland."

Media Contact: Chris Ward – 0408 033 422 cward@appea.com.au

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.