



Source: The Australian

THE Queensland government has threatened to shut down one of the biggest coal seam gas operators in the state unless it can plausibly explain why a well in the state's southeast erupted.

Contractors were putting a pump in a coal seam gas well operated by Arrow Energy near Dalby on the Darling Downs on Sunday morning when water and gas began gushing out.

Arrow Energy representatives said initially the geyser was about 90m high, but came down to about 40m and stayed at that level until the well was capped at midday yesterday.

Arrow Energy poured a mud-based mixture into the well adjacent to the Kogan-Condamine Road yesterday morning to stop the gas and water gushing out.

The nearest house was at Wilkie Creek, 5km to the northeast from the accident, but police and regulators closed off the scene for safety reasons.

State government investigators were on the scene yesterday and a full incident report will be compiled.

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Premier Anna Bligh pointed out the government had last year closed the operations of underground coal gasification company Cougar Energy.

"You've seen we are a government willing to shut down companies not doing the right thing in any of our energy sectors, and this company will now be the subject of a thorough investigation," she said.

"It does appear that this was a leak because of a transferring into a natural gas area, but that's something that has to be confirmed."

There has been rising concern in rural areas of Queensland and NSW in the past few weeks over the coal seam gas industry, with farmers and conservationists joining forces to oppose the industry.

The Labor government's hard line yesterday comes after the NSW government last week instituted a 60-day moratorium on the industry.

The new Coalition government also introduced tougher conditions for companies wanting to search for coal seam gas in NSW.

The well on the Darling Downs will not be used for export purposes but is part of an existing gas field that supplies the nearby Braemar Power Station.

Arrow Energy vice-president Tony Knight said that, while the well had been completed for some time, there had not been any activity there for over a year.

"We still have to finalise what actually happened, but it seems as though the water level has dropped in that time, so that when they went to put in the pump all this water and gas came out," he said.

Cattle and grain farmer Tom O'Connor, on whose land the well is situated, said he was only told of the incident at 2.30pm on Sunday, several hours after it had occurred.

"It wasn't on fire, but it was pretty impressive," he said.

Mr O'Connor has 12 wells on his property and said there had previously been three leakages or incidents.

"We've had other incidents and I've told them that when something happens we want to know straight away, and I'm a bit annoyed that that didn't happen," he said.

"They're all very friendly and matey, but when things go wrong they try to hide them."

Queensland Greens spokeswoman Libby Connors was critical of police for stopping industry opponent Dayne Pratsky at the nearby Tara estates from filming the site of the leakages.