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## **PIPELINE WARNING FOR GIPPSLAND LANDOWNERS**

Landowners whose property may be compulsorily acquired for a gas pipeline in South Gippsland have been warned to seek expert advice before signing anything.

Alinta is currently working on a \$50 million project to supply gas to 10,000 households in Korumburra, Leongatha, Inverloch and Wonthaggi.

Farmers affected by the pipeline are unhappy about the amount of compensation being offered – and the pressure for them to sign up.

Lawyer Ben Hardwick from Slater & Gordon says they should not make the same mistake as some farmers in western Victoria affected by the SEA gas pipeline in 2003.

"We met a number of farmers – too late – who had sold themselves short and signed agreements that undervalued their entitlements," he said.

"With proper advice they could have easily negotiated more favourable arrangements – like their neighbours.

"In addition, these agreements failed to take into account the ongoing impact and disruption associated with the construction process which can take more than 12 to 18 months."

"In contrast, a group of farming families in Gippsland whom we acted for in relation to the Basslink pipeline received proper compensation."

Mr Hardwick says that while the company is entitled to negotiate with farmers, farmers should realise that they are under no obligation to accept any offer made and can insist on a proper acquisition process with the landowners' rights set out under the Land Acquisition and Compensation Act.

"Under no circumstances should landowners sign option documents until they have obtained legal advice," he said.

"Otherwise they may bind themselves to less favourable terms and conditions – and an option document is a legally binding document."

"Property owners affected by the pipeline are entitled to proper compensation and minimum disruption to their lives and businesses."