



Alice Springs Town Council – Hearing Transcript

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6 March 2017

Alice Springs Convention Centre, Alice Springs

Speakers: Mayor Damien Ryan, Deputy Mayor Jamie de Brenni, Councillor Jade Kudrenko

Mayor Damien Ryan: The Alice Springs Town Council's Environmental Advisory Committee, the Central Australia Frack Freedom Rights recommending to our June 2016 Ordinary Council Meeting a proposal that the EAC, the Environmental Advisory Committee recommend to council that it supports an establishment of a no-go zone for shale gas fracturing activities through the drinking water aquifer for Alice Springs in the Amadeus Basin. Now discussions ensued regarding water protection and a broader perspective rather than a protection of a specific supply and the Council formally adopted a motion that reads, "That Council call on the Northern Territory Government to protect the Alice Springs water supply now and into the future." That resolution number 18681 was carried and is on the books of the Alice Springs Town Council.

Correspondence was written to the chief minister, the Honorable Adam Giles on the 25th of July, 2016. Where Council sought a response from the Northern Territory Government as well as information relating to any formal Northern Territory Government positions or actions. The response received from the Chief Minister clarified that in November 2015, the Northern Territory Government announced measures to protect areas of significance against future oil and gas exploration. Exploration will not be allowed in, and I'll quote the dot points, "Urban residential and rural residential areas, areas of cultural significance, areas of intense agriculture, areas of high ecological value and the areas which include assets of strategic importance to nearby residential areas.

As an authority, we have a very small representative piece of dirt in the middle of Australia that our concerns are more about our water supply that sits outside of it. In addition to this, it was noted in the Chief Minister's letter, there is currently a reserve block, an exclusion zone within the Alice Springs town boundary. It should be noted that no exploration activity can be undertaken or exploration permitted unless the environmental management plan had been approved by the Department of Mines and Energy. A company must provide a detailed assessment of how they plan to manage their activities and in particular, where water aquifers may be an issue. That assessments are undertaken by technical experts from the Department of Mines and Energy and the Northern Territory Environment

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Protection Authority. In response to the Hawke Report on Hydraulic Fracturing, new environment regulations were implemented on the 6th of July, 2016.

Following that response, as a Council we still have very significant concerns relating to potential social and environmental impacts associated with any hydraulic fracturing activities within our community and on our community.

Some of those are, we have identified is that under social impact is the potential risk to our community re social impacts on our town going forward. Infrastructure is of a concern to us as a local government authority, concerns about the potential impact on infrastructure such as roads, as a result of increased traffic. There could be a significant increase in heavy vehicles accessing Alice Springs during construction phase.

The community cohesion is another one of our very big concerns under social impact study, there's concerns about the potential impact on our community, particularly in relation to fly in and fly out workers.

The amenity values that Northern Territory has iconic wilderness values as a core part of the Australian outback, and they may be at risk through the development of unconventional gas industry and will have an adverse impact on the outback experience. These activities concern our Council economically as the impact on the Central Australian Tourism Industry which these days has grown markedly through mountain biking and trekking, wild life and environmental tourism. So, they are of a major concern.

Environmental impacts identified by the council are the aquatic ecosystems and biodiversity; we have a concern to the adverse impact on those systems including ground water dependent eco systems. This may result from changes in the quantity or the quality of surface or ground water available to us. Earth works, roads accessed during exploration drilling has a potential to cause increased erosion which also will cause difficulties to us in the spread of introduced weeds, disturb the top soil and damage habitats. Climate change, there are concerns in our community that greenhouse gases, including hydrocarbons and carbon dioxide will be released during fracturing and the associated activities. Emissions may be from sources such as well heads, pipe lines and so forth around this work.

The water aquifer impact to our community, we are concerned about the prospect of contamination as a result of induced connectivity between the hydraulic fractured near surface ground water and also with leaky walls as a result of poor design, construction, operation or abandonment practices as a result of well degradation over the life of the well. Re-injection of flow back water to produce water or treatment grinds into our ground water aquifer, induced connectivity between the different ground water systems



as the result of seismic activity caused by hydraulic fracturing, water supply and distribution. We're talking about quantity, there are concerns about adverse environmental impacts as a result of reduced water supply due the large amounts of water being extracted for use in hydraulic fracturing. We see we have a finite resource here in the middle of Australia and not easy access to another water supply in concern. If things happen it is totally illogical to assume that we can truck water into our community in case of emergency.

Our regional waste management facility impact, we realise the hydraulic fracturing requires the use of fluid; the fluid consists of water, sand and chemical additives. This fluid can be recycled and reused or it must be treated and disposed of. In Central Australia, we're the only regional waste management facility that is currently able to process or store fluid waste. Alice Springs Town Council would not be prepared to dispose of those fluid wastes without suitable chemical analysis of the chemical additives and detailed licence information from the organisation depositing the waste.

So we really do understand, as described when we met with you, that you were asking for scientific evidence, specific as I said at the beginning, we are community representatives and we cannot offer you that, but I would really to restate the Council's position, the motion that is on the books, "That Council call on the Northern Territory Government to protect the Alice Springs water supply now and into the future."

Thank you, Justice.

Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper:

Thank you very much. Anyone else?

Dr. David Jones:

One question. I'm David Jones. What is your perception of the current activities in the Amadeus Basin south of you. With respect to activities there, how is your relationship to that? How do you see that might be an interest to your water issues.

Mayor Damien Ryan:

What has happened up till now, hasn't affected our community. We're concerned about new practices in a greater area that may affect us in the future, simply because we're really reliant upon the fine water supplies. So yes we do understand what has happened, what work has been undertaken in the Palm Valley area, and so forth over time. We're not prepared as a council to just accept an open situation without your evidence, without your findings from this environment.

Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper:

Do you receive any benefits as a result of Shale Gas Industry?



Mayor Damien Ryan: To our community, yes there will be economic benefits going forward but the pressing issue on us as community representatives is to protect what we have now, more so than just grab at the economic benefits. So yes, I personally would be keen on a very balanced view of the whole situation. The issue seriously and I'm sorry I got to keep harping on it, is our water supply and the protection of our water supply, not just for our generation but for future.

Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper: Anyone else?

Dr. Vaughan Beck: Has the Council done any, or relied on any studies to give you some estimation of what your future water situation is? Do we have an understanding of what's there now and how long that's going to last?

Mayor Damien Ryan: As a local authority, or a local government in the Northern Territory, power and water are a Northern Territory Government responsibility. We do have representation on water advisory within the town. We understand that there is water there, it is just more expensive to get it as we go forward because it's deeper, so there is a cost factor around that water. We are not visualising at any restriction on our community over the next quite a number of years, our only concern was, if it is interrupted by this process that there is not identified Plan B.

Ms. Jane Coram: Jane Coram. Just following up on Gordon's question, are there any published studies that you are aware of that the panel could consider in relation to sustainability of the northern resources? The only reason [crosstalk 00:11:13]

Mayor Damien Ryan: No I couldn't give you that answer.

Ms. Jane Coram: If you could send us any details.

Mayor Damien Ryan: Certainly, I could inquire though the Northern Territory Government's water resources, yes.

Prof. Brian Priestly: Brian Priestly. You did indicate, as part of your concerns the social infrastructure effect, about fly, in fly out workers, has that been a feature of any of the existing activities that have occurred around Alice Springs so far, has there been experience with that?

Mayor Damien Ryan: In mining?

Prof. Brian Priestly: Yes, with fly in, fly out workers.

Mayor Damien Ryan: Yes we have a very big business to the north west of us, the [inaudible 00:12:20] Mining Operation, when it originally started, it employed lots of



people in our community but lots of supply from our community. As time has changed, that's turned to a fly in, fly out population, yes there are some people still employed but we don't benefit economically like we did when the organisation first started.

Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper: Thank you very much for your presentation today.

Mayor Damien Ryan: Thank you very much for giving us the opportunity.