



Seed Indigenous Youth Climate Network – Hearing Transcript

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Tennant Creek Training Centre, Tennant Creek

Speakers: Larissa Baldwin, Vanessa Farrelly

Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper: Welcome to the scientific inquiry to Hydraulic Fracturing in the Northern Territory. If you could please state your names and who you are appearing on behalf of or for today, thank you.

Larissa Baldwin: My name is Larissa Baldwin and I'm the Co-National director of the SEED Indigenous Youth Climate Network.

Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper: Thank you.

Vanessa Farrelly: My name is Vanessa. I'm a Southern Aranda woman, from like 100 kilometres south of Alice Springs and I'm a volunteer with SEED Indigenous Youth Climate Network, Vanessa Farrelly, that is.

Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper: Thank you. Who do you want to tell the Inquiry today?

Vanessa Farrelly: Yeah, so we're from organisation called SEED, which is Australia's first indigenous Youth climate network, so we're a network of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, standing up to protect country from the causes and impacts of climate change. So that's thinking about how climate change impacts Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia and especially in northern and central Australia. Yeah, from rising sea levels in the Torres Strait to increased bush fires and floods and droughts. That hit our communities, especially remote communities, who have less access to services. And also, climate changes about our land, because that's what's going to be affected and if anything's going to happen to our land, you need to involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It's our rights to control the thing that's most important to us, and basically, it's so often there aren't enough services in our communities already, and not enough health services, not enough disaster relief, not enough housing -- and climate change is just going to exacerbate all of those pre-existing issues. So, this is something that definitely is about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs.



And where I'm from, by 2050 I've heard that the temperature could rise by twenty degrees, which is massive for people living on outstations with no access to the kind of housing to prepare themselves for that. It's basically going to make a mass kind of scale removal of people off their country and off their land because it's just not hospitable for us to live there anymore. So that's about our culture. It's about our survival as a people and so it definitely concerns us. And then SEED also kind of traces that back to what causes climate change and how that impacts Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people again and that's fossil fuel extraction on our land. So that's why we got involved in fracking in the Northern Territory because fracking is going to contribute to climate change and make the impacts worse, and it's also fifty percent of the land in the Northern Territory is under some Aboriginal title and so definitely it's about our rights and it's about getting consent and then it's about how that comes back and impacts us when the climate change impacts hits us.

Larissa Baldwin:

So I guess when we, SEED as an organisation, our role we feel is to raise awareness of climate change in community and talk to people about what's already happening, what the changes they can see, but also make sure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are empowered to take, raise their voice on this issue because right now, we can see a lot of this stuff that's happening around climate is dominated by non-indigenous people and it doesn't talk about what/how the impact is going to happen in the territory. In the last year alone, we've seen almost two degrees of warming. We've seen massive events like, coral bleaching in Queensland, we've seen the massive mangrove drive die off from the gulf all the way to Weipa -- and these are climate impacts that inevitably are going to impact us. When we first heard about the scale of the licences in the territory, one of the reasons we came here is we were like, as young Aboriginal people really sure that you could bet that the consultation hadn't happened with community that there weren't going to be communities that were covered in these licences and they didn't know about it.

So what have we wanted to come up here and to do is just try and reach out to communities, see what they knew, and also basically raise their concerns or empower our communities to raise their concerns to government, so that's what we've been doing over the last year specifically, in the NT. One of the things that came up, so we came up here to maybe find one community work with them, what ended up happening is that we were inundated by people who were just like we haven't been informed about what's going to happen here. We know one of the principles that we've talked about with working with SEED is like, the UNN rights Indigenous peoples and that's to free, informed and prior consent. And there are so many instances that we've seen over the last year where people just don't have the information about what fracking is going to mean. We've seen it in the resources that have been provided to people, we've talked to elders, people who've said that when they were approached by these companies, they were told that the impact on land would be the size of a billycan. We understand that in many places, interpreters weren't used, so this is a massive issue, and then once we actually explained to people what fracking is in language that they can understand, the size and scale of not just the



fracking industry, but the fact of how much land mass, shale gas fields are going to cover.

People are really concerned; they're concerned about one, water; two, they're concerned about the fact people know that they can only say yes and no to these agreements in the exploration stage, so that means during extraction, they have no right to say where these wells are going to be drilled, and obviously for Aboriginal people where we have to deal with cultural heritage and looking after our land, this is a big issue for people. The companies for shale gas because of the where its trapped and that sort of stuff, they're not going to be able to set out a neat plan of where they're going to have to drill, they have to drill where the gas is; and if Aboriginal people don't have a say in that, then that creates a lot of issues for people. We've spent a lot of time up in Borrooloola, where people have been dealing with the run-off and the pollution from McArthur river mine, and one of the things that the people are talking about on the ground a lot is like, 'what if this does impact our water people know that their water comes from ground sources?', and people are really worried that this could be polluted. And I guess, from a more Aboriginal-centric point of view, is just that, we are a nation of people that have been removed from land and we have dealt with over decades the removals, the stolen generation, there's a lot of trauma already in our community, and we've seen people are really worried and we don't go into communities to be alarmous. What we want to do is give people information about what's happening, what shall gas fracking could mean for the country and what evidence we have.

A lot of the things that we can point to is stuff that happening in the United States, stuff that's happened in Mexico, where people have actually had to evacuate communities, and we know that for Aboriginal people, the actual evacuation from land - that would cause a great amount of trauma. So, when you actually look at this industry, it's going to create some jobs, it's going to create some money, but two weeks ago, or three weeks ago, we have the government produce a report on closing the gap that said that it wasn't, except for one key issue, it wasn't closing the gap in a bunch or range of different issues. We see fracking in the Northern Territory because of the tops of communities because of these are our most remote, our most vulnerable communities, we see this as a huge risk that people aren't taking into consideration. We think it's really important that Aboriginal people are consulted, and we really want to thank the panel for ... we did really push for, in the stages of the last election, we really did push for Aboriginal people to get enrolled to vote, to lobby the government and say that their voice wasn't being heard on this issue.

We also talked a lot about the fact that the government had promised a moratorium, so we're ... none part as an organisation, so what we did provide was information about what people proposing about fracking, who's pro-fracking, and who was ... I think ALP ultimately was saying that they were putting a pause on it and allow time for consultation. So we made it ... we went out into a lot of communities throughout the territory talking about the fact that this territory election was going to be really important, having their voice heard. We've been doing a lot of work in the lead up to



this panel, and so we're really grateful that this process had gone through. We've done a lot of lobbying with traditional owners, just making sure that they have the resources to come actually down to meet people and explain what their issues are. So, for us, we know this is the first step but we really want you to know that we are actually putting a lot of faith in this process, because so far, the process that has been happening with the agreements and the land acts and agreements with companies with the land councils, people aren't informed the resources of that they're getting are really terrible. They just don't go far enough to explain.

And we understand through this process, this is not the hearing process that you're going to get in remote communities, but I think in a lot of places, what we've seen from these companies is that they've actually used the fact that people have low literacy levels against them. We really feel like they're not being told the whole story, people are really worried about this and what it means. And it was one of the reasons ... one of the things that we heard about that came from the community when this panel was put together is where Aboriginal voices were going to be heard and whether or not the people on this panel were actually going to be able to understand what Aboriginal people were saying. So, you might have noticed that there was a push to try and get some of Aboriginal representation on this panel.

Vanessa Farrelly:

We also know that the gas that we fracked will be ultimately mainly for exports to either the east coast or other countries, basically, that to me, says that you're fracking my country and pumping a whole bunch of chemicals and sand and water into the ground, and using our communities to get there, for energy that we won't even see or use. It's basically saying that our land and Aboriginal people in remote communities are just sacrificed zones for the rest of the world to continue their lifestyles but at what expense to us?

Larissa Baldwin:

The other thing on ... so there has been some promises of jobs, one of the other things that we've had read a lot into is basically what the fracking industry looks like when it's on communities, we've said that this is our most vulnerable communities but actually what does it look like to have a high volume of FIFO workers coming into our communities. When go out to communities ... we went out to Borroloola at the beginning of the year, last year, and we talked about what communities wanted to see and try to give them some skills to talk to each other and explain that everybody needs to come together and decide what they want; and we ... throughout this have been inundated with young people, elders who would love to have jobs on community, but these aren't the type of jobs that are asked, they're being given to them or options that are being given to them by the government. So, it's like, 'you have mining or you have nothing'. There are many other ways that we know, jobs could work in remote communities, we've seen an excellent inquiry into renewable energy and doing the pros and cons and the cost analysis of something like having remote communities solar it actually will provide jobs for a longer time. We know that fracking jobs only have ... the jobs are actually basically only by the wells being fracked and then nothing.



So one of the other things on jobs is that, we've seen over the last year a huge amount of community support go behind ... so people from country which is ranges coming back on country and one of the reasons we really support this have been working closely with that campaign is that we know that when we talk about mitigation and adaptation on climate change, our people have to be front and centre, because right now, that's in the situation that people are living, we're the least readily ... it's going to take us the most to adapt to climate change. Whether that ... the issues with housing and that sort of stuff, and extreme temperature rises, over the last few weeks in the Northern Territory, we've seen a massive wet season. We've had very small wet seasons over the last couple of years, we've seen communities cut off, we have seen people have to get food drops in. Climate change means that these things are going to happen more often, and they're going to be more extreme. The impact on people is going to be greater.

So even if you go back even two years ago, in Elcho Island when we had massive cyclones, we had that community two weeks without being able to get any sort of aid. So, climate change is really going to impact our remote communities, and this isn't like the rest of the country where people are debating about climate change -- when you go out to remote communities, we don't use the language of climate change, we talk about temperature variance. And one of the incredible things that we've talked about is the fact that a lot of old people talk about how they can track through their stories, climate change and temperature variance, and now that they can prove that it's different like you could go out and ... we're not ... lots of people say that we're not scientists, but I believe that we are the first scientists. Through our stories we have the data, we have the information that says that climate change is real and climate change is happening and what is happening now is unprecedented. So, when we go out in the communities and explain to them how climate change happens, people understand that we need to actually play a role in providing and safeguarding our communities from the worst impacts of climate change.

I guess the other thing ... we've pretty much gone through everything ... one of the other things that I want to say to the Inquiry is that we know that there has been an extension of where you're going to go the remote communities, but we feel like they are a bunch of remote communities that haven't been visited in this process, and we'd like to make sure that you get to hear from them as well. While we've touched on a bunch of things that we've heard from our communities, we actually really want to make sure that these people are at the panel so you can talk to them; so we will be doing a lot of work to people and to panels and making sure they transport it there, and you can hear from them directly.

I think one of the other things that people need to know is that there is a lot of anger in Aboriginal communities about these permits and leases and agreements. People have been one, lobbying government, but also there is a lot of legal action being taken because people don't feel like they were aware or that they're unsure ... one of the stories that we've heard is that people, there is an agreement being signed off for lease and the community



has been asking who signed it off, and they've got nothing from the land councils to validate this agreement. I don't want to go back too much into that, but you will hear that when you go to one of your visits but that is going through a legal process. So it's just people don't feel like they know about fracking, they don't feel like ... they feel like this whole process of getting people to sign agreements and land access agreements has been really ... seeing these companies [inaudible 00:16:12] on over communities. People also really concerned about water, obviously, and also really concerned about fracking coming too close to their sacred areas and that sort of thing.

So over the process of last year, we have seen unprecedented amounts of ... we've had even police say to us when we've been marching down the streets in Mataranka like they've never seen so many Aboriginal people come out and turn out to a rally and that sort of stuff. And we've had incredible community support, I reckon ... I don't think I've seen anything to this level in the NT -- I come from a family of people who work in communities and spend a lot of time working in NT. The amount of people that have been out on the streets talking about this for traditional owners, they really are taking it seriously and we really want to make sure that the government and this Inquiry is committed to listening to us. So that's all from us, thank you.

Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper:

Thank you very much. Can I just open up your presentation to the panel, can I just start off with them the remote communities which you think we should visit that are not listed in the background and issues paper. Which ones have we missed?

Larissa Baldwin:

We really feel like you should visit Elliott -

Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper:

Ah, yes, yes -

Larissa Baldwin:

That you should visit the [inaudible 00:17:29] as well ...

Larissa Baldwin:

We have some others, but -

Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper:

No, no, go for it.

Larissa Baldwin:

I can actually just give them to you later.

Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper:

Alright, that sounds good, if you could send that to the taskforce [crosstalk 00:17:42] would be really good ...

Larissa Baldwin:

The other thing I wanted to say is, we know that we jumped around a bunch of information but we do intend to put in a report that has a lot of I guess links to different, where this evidence is coming from as well -

Hon. Justice



Rachel Pepper: Excellent, thank you. That would be very, very useful. Thank you very much. So, any questions ... yes, Dr. Beck.

Dr. Vaughan Beck: Just to follow up, mainly on that point, because you said you're going to provide some further information -- you did make mention during your presentation that in the United States, people had to leave their country and you're obviously concerned about possible implications for that in Australia, so if you got any information references to that particular off-country movement, then that would be particularly useful for us thanks very much.

Larissa Baldwin: Yes, we do actually, someone had people come out here from Wyoming as well and explain it. What had happened to them as well.

Dr. Vaughan Beck: Oh okay, thanks, thank you very much.

Larissa Baldwin: Yeah, but we can do that.

Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper: Sorry, I saw more hands up here ... Dr. Ritchie.

Dr. David Ritchie: Thank you. It's just two things really. There's one, just to reassure you that the committee completely understands that Aboriginal people in all the areas proposed for fracking are actually land owners. So they have not only, it's just their right, as land owners to be completely involved in a number of very important rights one of which is to protect places that are culturally significant. The question I'd like to ask though, is that I got the impression that you felt that notwithstanding those rights, the native title represented body of the northern lands council or the central lands council that straddles this part of the world, and that they have been some at least perceived inadequacies in the way that the actual Traditional Owners have been supported. Is that something you feel that the committee should follow up?

Larissa Baldwin: Yeah, I really do, that there's a lot of examples of it that I could touch on, even through the process of what we heard in Tennant Creek that at the moment that JEMENA is talking traditional owners and today in the paper, an article has come out on ABC, with the land trust talking about the fact that they weren't told that fracking was going to go through this pipeline. They're very worried about the impacts of fracking and I feel like that people have been dishonest with them. I think that this panel can really, I guess shine a light on the fact that this process hasn't been done properly and that maybe, I don't know, like how its fixed through the Land Council and that sort of stuff, but more resourcing needs to go into some sort of quality assurance about what is being said to ... they like the fact that there's no translators and that sort of thing in communities as well as a huge issue. But just like a lot of the companies have also said that they can't explain to people what ... because you can't, you can't explain like upfront what the shale gas field would look like, of the McArthur basin, but that doesn't mean you don't explain to people what a shale gas field is, and that's what's been happening. So, yeah -

Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper: Yes, Jane Coram.



Ms. Jane Coram: Going back to the panel's consultations with their sort of particular remote communities, do you think there's been enough time allowed for consultations process because we've heard some other paper suggest that there isn't enough time for word to get around and for people to consider the issues?

Larissa Baldwin: I think there hasn't been enough time to get ... like it typically takes us, once we're actually in a community, a week to bring people together, to let people know to make sure we got all the people that we need there, and so it's a little bit of like actually going before a meeting and making sure people are aware about it, people have limited connectivity to phones and internet and that sort of stuff. There's a way when you're in that space, you don't typically know what day it is, do you know what I mean? So, for us to go into communities, we need to do a lot of prep work and I think that that ... like it's not good enough to just rely on MLA to send out through their officers to put you dealing with people that have low literacy levels, and you're dealing with communities that may not even speak English. So, is the material, is the awareness able to get to them, in their language that they're speaking? Is a huge issue and a huge barrier.

I think also that the panel should actually work with organisations that actually are good and have shown that they have proven to work with communities like health centres and that sort of stuff, that's a very easy way to let people know that stuff is happening in their communities like Centrelink. Those like ... I guess organisations that people come into contact with when they're living in remote communities. So, we think that one ... that could be better, but also in terms of actually when you're going out into community, making sure you have translators, because I asked the other day, but making sure that ... people are aware what sort of information that you're asking for, because the issues reported is big and it's being extended and it's great, but people don't know that these are the things that they need to talk to. And I think that's ... if you're not allowing people to speak to the things that you're actually looking at, then that's a huge issue. And maybe then you seem like you leave the community like, 'oh, they're okay with it', but actually if you're asked about a bunch of other things that they don't agree with us.

Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper: Yes, Doctor Andersen.

Dr. Alan Andersen: Just got a question following up your comment about how little progress there has been in closing the gap on indigenous disadvantage and just wondering your thoughts on if all the concerns that you've talked about now were addressed, and if the gas industry were to proceed and part of that was a commitment to reinvest funds into indigenous communities to help close the gap, what are your thoughts on how that should happen, what should be done?

Larissa Baldwin: I think generally, where we are right now is actually making the problem worse. So right now, anything that needs to go into communities whether it's health, housing, or education, sporting -- all these things rely heavily on mining, and that creates a power dynamic so if you're asking people, if



people need basic services and you're saying that they're going to get them from the mining industry, then what you're asking them to do is weigh these basic services up for these type of jobs on [inaudible 00:24:37] ... we know that this ... we've seen reports over and over again saying that the royalties that come from mining into communities are usually heavily controlled by mining companies and that's not a good thing. We've seen that create divisions in community. I think that what we need to see more ... I know, we say this, we work as a climate organisation, and we say that we need to keep all the fossil fuels on the ground, but when we go out into communities, we're absolutely as young Aboriginal people understand economic disadvantage. We never go into communities saying, 'we're anti-mining', we don't talk badly about mobs that accept mining on country, because we know we need that money to come in. We understand the complexity there.

But the fracking industry from my personal perspective is too risky. And I think that's not proven in Australia, why you'd take the risk on our remote communities to see whether it works. I don't think it should be tested in the Northern Territory because these are our most vulnerable communities. There are issues here that are going to be exacerbated because of this mining, because of climate change. So, I think it's just one of those things we have to draw a hard line there are our royalties from mining, but I don't think that that's going to close the gap. I don't think that can be ... to my mind, I think what needs to happen is that government actually need to involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the process, because right now, people are doing things to us, not with us - and that is why a lot of these programmes are not working.

Vanessa Farrelly:

Also, there's no other community in Australia, you have to make the choice between basic education, health and housing, only at the expense of selling their land off and destroying their country that present us the only option to Aboriginal people and that's just not fair.

Larissa Baldwin:

And we also, from a perspective of a climate organisation, but because we've done ... we didn't come into the northern territory with a stance of wanting a ban on fracking - we do support a ban on fracking - we got there because communities have said time and time again, 'I just want it banned'. They don't want to be humbugged by these companies who keep coming out and saying, 'no, we know if you have a land trust you can say no to someone and they can't come back for six years', but if you've made title agreements then the next company that comes along that wants to frack, you have to do these process all over and over again, and it's not fair.

Audience:

You know, just asking for you to speak up, you know you've just got a text they can't hear on the live screen [crosstalk 00:27:05]

Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper:

Yeah, we are having technical difficulties, I think due to the mobile coverage which keeps dropping in and out, which I think everybody in this room has currently been experiencing. I understand that's a problem that's been ongoing now for a period of days and there's not much we can do about that, I'm afraid.



Audience: No worries.

Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper: Thank you.

Audience: Someone's telling me like, see everything, but we can't hear a word.

Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper: Sorry, there was another question? Anything further? Thank you very much, both of you, for coming today and presenting.