



## ***Katherine Town Council – Hearing Transcript***

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**8 March 2017**

***Knotts Crossing Restaurant, Katherine***

***Speaker: Robert Jennings***

Robert Jennings: Your Honour and taskforce members, first of all my apologies for the mix up in the time this morning, but we're here now.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important inquiry, which stands to have a potential impact on Katherine community, the region, economically, socially and environmentally.

Katherine Town Council endorses the consultative process so far, and we encourage that and we would like to be part of that as is possible in the future, as you move ahead.

We're actually putting in a written submission, but I will only read excerpts from the document today, and I'm sure you've had a lot of repeat in messages, but it's still important to cover some of them today. We also note the comprehensive identification of risks identified in this paper here as well.

The town of Katherine is composed of about 11,500 people, and so the numbers will vary but that's what we estimate at the moment, and it services a region of about 29,000 people. Most importantly is the centre for a number of key industries for us. There's the industry of tourism, agriculture, defence, conventional mining, as well as government and non-government agencies. And what you'll notice is a number of these industries heavily rely on water, whether it's tourism, or agriculture, so on the environment and our water resources. We're in the unusual position that Katherine Town Council boundary goes a certain way that covers these industries, but the aquifers that serve our region lie further south of us, so that's why we talk about a couple of elements in our presentation today.

So our primary concern is the effect of any potential contamination on the environment that could adversely impact our residence and our industries, and ultimately, as one of the caretakers for future generations, this is our greatest responsibility and one that we entrust the taskforce to safeguard.



We've made a number of submissions already, not to the panel, but we've met with the panel, the taskforce, and we've also put a number of letters into the departments before, and we'll present all that as part of our presentation when we submit it.

And I also thank, I should thank appropriately, I'm not a subject matter expert, but we have spoken to a number of groups, Regional Development Australia, as well as Local Government Association of the Northern Territory, who've done some evidence collection for us and so that we are able to speak more authoritatively.

So our key request in line with the strong position of our community, is to seek a boundary to be placed around the Katherine Town Council, so our municipality that precludes any hydraulic fracturing of onshore unconventional reservoirs within the municipality.

In previous discussions with the Northern Territory government, this appeared to be quite achievable. Should hydraulic fracturing proceed within the Northern Territory generally, there should be a period of robust and exhaustive consultation, which is part of why we're here today, and the full implementation and ongoing rigorous enforcement of best practice regulations.

Key to this is the adequate resourcing of these regulations, and also to achieve these goals, and Katherine Town Council are happy to be part of the consultation process, as I said, as much as possible.

I have eight points by the way, and I'm on to number three.

The regulation of fracturing and associate activity needs to have an appropriate level of independence. The oversight of compliance with the regulations must give stakeholders and the public confidence that the regulations are being fully adhered to and cannot be abated.

Where possible, regulations should guide industries, choice of chemicals, to reduce the risks associated with a chemical spill or contamination of water resources. The protection of all aquifers must be of the highest priority in the regulatory framework. There could be, for example, a regulated minimum distance between potable water resources and any fracking activity.

Wherever possible, fracking activity should only be undertaken using non-potable water resources. The use of potable water resources should only be possible following a strict and fully transparent approvals process. The impacts on ground water resources of any water use should be measured and managed proactively.

Number seven. Appropriate industry bond arrangements must be in place to ensure that the capital exists to address any legacy issues, and then Council believes that the benefits of the production of these resources should flow



to benefit not only overseas markets, but as well as the Australian local market as well.

In essence, we're responsible for our Katherine community and that's our core responsibility. Our biggest one is to have a ban on fracking within our boundary, but if there is going to be an industry in place, and we leave this to the taskforce as the experts, to make sure that the risk is minimised to the extent that we can ensure that that job that I've talked about, of taking care of our future generations, is able to be done.

Thank you for your consultation work to date and we look forward to seeing the results of the process.

Hon. Justice  
Rachel Pepper:

Thank you very much, thank you. Any questions from the panel? Yes, Dr Beck.

Dr. Vaughan Beck:

You mentioned, I think, right towards the end there, there should be some benefits to the community. Can you elaborate on what those sorts of benefits might be and what priorities would you put on the benefits that need to flow to the community?

Robert Jennings:

The specific point was related to the gas use itself, and maybe the pricing and the benefit of the resources to the industry. Our highest priority is to have a frack free municipal area, 'cause that's what we're responsible for, but if the industry was to proceed, Katherine is a centre naturally, and I suspect a lot of these economic sort of situations would be resolved naturally in terms of a supply-demand type scenario, we're placed well for that. It would be good to see local resources being used, that would be our ideal.

In terms of the benefits, the number one is the environment to maintain that. Industries of tourism and agriculture rely heavily on that, and in terms of community benefit, it's hard to know that one. I think that I'm probably not able to speak on that one enough.

Dr. Vaughan Beck:

That's fine. Thank you.

Hon. Justice  
Rachel Pepper:

Dr. Jones.

Dr. David Jones:

I have a question about your municipality and the exclusion area that you were talking about.

Robert Jennings:

Yes.

Dr. David Jones:

Does that mean the boundaries of the municipality, do they include your water extraction field for ground water supplementation, or is that outside that area? You are reading it, it's to be to the south, but I presume you might also request an exclusion area around that particular area as well.



Robert Jennings: I answer that in two parts. The first one is that for our municipality, which is about 7,000 square kilometres, and I think it's not particularly large in terms of the region, that's our clear area, and I guess the focus on there is because we have a lot of industry, we have a lot of people, we have a lot of lifestyle and farming within that area, that's the focus for us.

Dr. David Jones: That's the part on your area as well.

Robert Jennings: In essence that's correct, but I guess the concern here is that because we rely on our water resources, which extend considerably past our municipality. I think my understanding is there's three large aquifers that we feed off, and our key concern is that nothing as a part of the industry has an impact that affects our community. By extension, it would be up to the other local governments around us to have the same pressure to take care of their communities. That would be our opinion.

Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper: Anyone else?

So I just want to be perfectly clear, I hope I am. The exclusion zone is predicated on or driven by concerns about water and making sure water is protected is that it in a nutshell?

Robert Jennings: Pretty much. I think environment I would extend that so that in your report you do very good work of identifying land and water and a number of other things, so you could extend it to a truck driving past which had the chemicals that were in it, so all those sort of things. It would be more safeguarding our community and our environments, I would say are the largest ones.

Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper: Any other questions? Yes, Dr. Jones.

Dr. David Jones: I guess one of the issues is about the industry of this type is increased truck movements and things like that up and down the Stuart Highway, and so on, and damage to roads. What would be your council's view on that? What's your responsibility in terms of picking up the tab for that kind of activity?

Robert Jennings: That's a good question. There's two sets of roads. There's roads that Territory government take care of, and those are the major arterial routes, and local council take care of the secondary roads, which can be quite major. I suspect that the major arterial routes will take the most traffic for these sort of movements, not that I'm shifting the ... someone will have to pay for it, but in this case local council will not be responsible for the majority of costs.

Again, our focus is on making sure our community is safe in the future generations as well as our environment.

Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper: Yes, Ms. Coram.

Ms. Jane Coram: Just a further question around the no-go zone -



Robert Jennings: Yes.

Ms. Jane Coram: - you've noted that your aquifers that the town industries are dependent on extend beyond the municipality area, and I'm just wondering would you not want to protect those aquifers up-gradient from the town area as well, so there aren't activities that could damage them and then flow into the municipality area?

Robert Jennings: That would be our ideal. The end result, I suspect, of one of the key results of the taskforce, is to determine whether the level of risk is in the range of what's acceptable, and so we rely on the taskforce to ...

So our ideal would be to say yes, if we did allow that, that would definitely keep Katherine safe, and so I would ask the taskforce to consider that because I think that would be a good solution. It lies outside our municipality, so I don't want to speak for other councils to say they should not have that area, so in the end, and I don't know enough.

I point out these elements that I think are key points that concern us and if those risks can be reduced so that I don't have to turn up to my community and say, "Something happened, agriculture's gone, our tourism ..." Once you have one industry go, tourism can drop easily, that's the sort of industry it is, and so then we lose two of our ...

Of course, we have a defence industry and they draw the water as well, and all of our residents drink the water as well, so if we have to close up shop and we haven't had our say in this process, I would be concerned. But in answer to your question, yes, there would be a logic in covering that area further to the south, yes.

Hon. Justice  
Rachel Pepper:

Anyone else? Mr. Jennings, please, thank you very much for coming today and making your presentation and we look forward to your written documentation in due course.

Robert Jennings: Thank you very much.

Hon. Justice  
Rachel Pepper:

And I think that brings to close the end of this part of the public hearings, but hopefully we'll see more of you, or some, or all of you tonight between 5:00 and 7:00 for the community consultation round tables. Thank you.