



Alice Springs – Domenico Pecorari

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Alice Springs Convention Centre, Alice Springs

Speakers: Domenico Pecorari

Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper:

Do we have our next speaker here? Mister Pecorari? I might ask him to come forward please. Please be seated, thank you. Sir, this is being recorded so if you could please state your name, and if you're appearing on behalf of anyone please say who you're appearing on behalf of. Thank you very much.

Domenico Pecorari:

My name is Domenico Pecorari, I'm just here on my own behalf.

Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper:

Thank you. Whenever you're ready.

Domenico Pecorari:

Okay. I want to thank you all for allowing the public to make submissions, I think it's a very important process. I must declare from the outset, I'll just read from my pre-prepared. I've got some more I can leave with you.

Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper:

Thank you.

Domenico Pecorari:

I will say from the outset that I have read and seen a lot of material on the issue of fracking, and that I am of the considered opinion that fracking is detrimental to the natural environment in general. It threatens both the quality and quantity of water supply to our communities, that it will have a negative impact on our existing pastoral and tourism industries, all the while presenting little economic benefit to the Territory, with most profits serving the interests of overseas shareholders. Having said that, I'm not going to talk or add any more to those issues, I think that they've been covered by many other people who are also presenting. My main interest is in the social impacts that fracking will have on the make-up of our communities.

Illustrating that, I'd like to say that prior to coming to Alice Springs nearly 35 years ago now, I was offered a lucrative position. Effectively running an architectural practice in Mount Isa, Queensland. Although the benefits financially and to my career were quite obvious, I turned it down. I turned it down because I simply couldn't get over the metallic stench that was coming from the mining stacks. Although all the locals and the government, everyone was saying that it was not a problem, I was unconvinced that it couldn't possibly be other than detrimental to my health.

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Today Mount Isa has a living with lead alliance, which reminds me every time I see it on TV that I made the right choice. Soon after that experience I came to Alice Springs on a three month contract, working for an architectural firm. I was wondering how I could stand three months of Alice Springs in the middle of the desert, I had a completely different picture of what to expect. I thought that it would be worthwhile from a career point of view. It didn't take me long to realise that Alice Springs had a lot going for it. When my friends in Perth, who were quite surprised my move would say, "Why Alice Springs?" I used to say, paraphrasing Peter O'Toole in Lawrence of Arabia, because it's so clean. It was, it was in the middle of the desert and I saw the desert and the natural environment around Alice Springs as being nothing but clean. It had plenty of clear blue skies, clean air, clean and plentiful water supply. An unspoiled, natural landscape that promoted for me an ideal lifestyle.

It didn't take long that I decided that I could spend a great deal more time. I didn't think that it would be the rest of my life. I managed to talk my then fiancée, a practicing doctor, to come to town as well. She also believed that Alice Springs was a great place to raise a family. It has proven to be. In the recent years though, we've been a little worried with some of the threats. Firstly the Uranium mine over our water supply, a town water supply that was muted some years back only 20 kilometers from our town, south of our town. That was our first concern.

Then the radioactive waste dump in Tennant Creek, which would have meant a lot of the material coming through town on our railway line, directly through town, and I have to say that I've seen two derailments in town in my time. I suspect that it's something that happens on a regular basis. Now we're seriously considering whether we should stay in the Territory or not, and if fracking goes ahead we will seriously be looking at setting up and moving on.

We know other professionals in town, friends and people we know who have very similar thoughts. I can't help think of what effect this drain would have on the centers like Alice Springs. But not only Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Borroloola, wherever really. Especially Alice Springs, which reputedly has the highest number of PhD qualified residents in Australia. I heard someone say that but I don't know if they were bragging or not. I think there is, knowing a lot of my friends around town. I think a lot of highly qualified people tend to come to Alice Springs. Not as a last resort, but because they actually like it and they want to be here. What's behind most of that is that natural, unspoiled environment.

It's also very difficult to recruit professionals to regional centers, and those that make the change do it mainly for lifestyle reasons. As my wife and I did over 33 years ago. The environmental changes that will be brought about by fracking, both real and perceived because some of them will be real and others will be just perceived, people will just see the Territory as ... I saw the film only last night, a fractured place. It will be less of an attraction. I also believe that once that attraction is lost through fracking, that it'll be lost

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forever. I think because of that, we need to give very, very careful consideration before we take those steps.

Although it's not an entirely scientific submission I'm making, hopefully on the qualification of social science it might qualify. Thank you.

- Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper: Thank you very much for your heartfelt submission. Eloquently put, the panel's appreciative particularly of hearing people's first-hand accounts and first hand perceptions and concerns. Thank you.
- Domenico Pecorari: Thank you.
- Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper: Yes? Doctor Andersen.
- Dr. Alan Andersen: Thanks, Mr. Pecorari. It'd be very sad if you felt you did have to leave the NT after all this time. I was wondering if the moratorium were lifted, how close would fracking have to be for you personally to feel that it's infringed? I say that in a couple of contexts, in that there's already some gas development in Palm Valley and of course the [inaudible 01:37:14] fields in the territory context are quite close to here. Can you give me some indication of that, and maybe some of your other friends who you said feel similarly?
- Domenico Pecorari: That's a very good question. I would say anything and anywhere that would likely effect the health of Alice Springs. From an air pollution point of view, because our prevailing winds are mainly from the south east, I would think anywhere down south of that area you wouldn't want to have any dust which was laden with dangerous material blowing over the town. From a point of view of the water supply, we would have to make sure that there was no activity anywhere near the aquifers that connect to our water supply or over our water supply. Because I think the community would be perhaps the last to know if there was a problem to eventuate. That problem may occur many years down the track after the fracking companies have left and we're left with the mess. Also I think it would have to be based on minimising, not even minimising, eliminating the possibility, no matter how negligible, of any threat to air, water, and the kind of life giving resources and things that we have here. The elements.
- Dr. Alan Andersen: Yes, I'd be particularly interested in the non-physical part, you mentioned the physical and one can measure that. But you did mention that there was a perception, even if it's not the reality or however you put it. There's the perception. Can you say more from that perception perspective what distances might be [crosstalk 01:39:12]-
- Domenico Pecorari: I would imagine that would have to cover the kind of areas that people would go for a drive around central Australia. You may jump in a four wheel drive and go off down any of the highways, go down to Ayers Rock. The last thing you would want to see would be gas fracking fields along the way.

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That is also not only from a point of view of visitors like tourists, but I think Territorians themselves also feel that kind of ownership. Having fracking when most Territorians don't want it would just be seen as a slap in the face, as lacking any kind of respect for what the locals think.

I came here because this place was so unspoiled and so natural. I just thought this would be a fantastic place to live. Anything that would affect that would I think give this place a tarnished image. That would affect people wanting to come here.

Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper: Thank you. Yes, Doctor Beck?

Dr. Vaughan Beck: Yes, Mr. Pecorari. Thank you very much for your thoughtful presentation. I haven't been to Alice Springs many times, but I'm thinking of trying to do the Mereenie loop and go around and have a look at that. That's on the bucket list that I'd like to do.

Domenico Pecorari: Very good.

Dr. Vaughan Beck: But I look here on the map that we've got on page 37 out of our report about conventional wells and frack wells that sit around near Alice Springs. I just did some calculations; I think there's about 34 fractured wells out of a total of some 91 wells in the immediate vicinity. I haven't been there on the Mereenie loop, but am I when I go out there going to see some of these wells? How does that impact upon my and your visual concerns, and your broader concerns about having wells in the immediate vicinity?

Domenico Pecorari: The usual tracks that tourists and locals would take to have some time out in the outback, iconic outback, is only part of the area that we need to consider. Because also as Territorians with four wheel drives, we take off on isolated little tracks and explore. I have some friends who love to do nothing more than go and explore where the early explorers went. Retrace their steps and so on. We aren't just limited to the main roads or where tourists would go. A lot of people who come to central Australia seek out those quiet little places beside some dry creek bed where they can spend a few days of utter peace. It's not surprising to come upon a caravan or some kind of a four wheel drive with a great array hanging off it. In what you think are the most isolated places, and I think a lot of people have had experiences like that. It isn't so much whether you'll be able to see these wells, it's just knowing that they're there will have an effect on the attraction of the place.

There really is nothing better than being out in the middle of nowhere and feel like you are the only person for hundreds of kilometers around, with just endless sky of stars. It's a very special experience, and it's of course very easy to lose that through an activity, a mining activity which a lot of people do not like.

Dr. Vaughan Beck: Thank you.

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- Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper: Thank you, just I guess following on from Doctor Beck's question. Again I'm working off the diagram on page 37 of the interim report. By one calculation there are at least 91 wells, they're there. Does that cause that detraction? Does that mean that that's a fractured place, to pick up some of your language, and it's spoiled and it's not natural anymore?
- Domenico Pecorari: I believe maybe most of those are on Lake Amadeus, are they? North of Ayers Rock? Are they roughly in that area? Or are they in the immediate Alice Springs area?
- Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper: Some of them are in the immediate Alice Springs area, yes.
- Domenico Pecorari: I'm not aware of those.
- Dr. Ross Smith: Maybe we shouldn't have told you.
- Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper: Yes, Doctor Smith.
- Dr. Ross Smith: Thanks very much for your insights and your personal story. I was very much taken particularly by your commentary about the possibility of professional drain from Alice Springs in the event of this. That was a perspective that I personally hadn't heard before, so I appreciate that. But I then wondered whether if you could have such a development in areas that met your requirements, as you explained to Doctor Andersen for it to be acceptable if it was not within the wind catchment, not draining water resources. If it then provided professional opportunities in increased employment but also provision of services to an industry in the region if not the vicinity, do you think that that would have any influence on such a professional exodus?
- Domenico Pecorari: I don't think so. I think that professionals, if you can get them out of the capital cities at all-
- Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper: We're here.
- Domenico Pecorari: Yes. Only go for an area that has got some other qualities that they want. Maybe it is a quieter, more relaxed lifestyle, maybe it is just the fact that you can cycle into work. Maybe it's the clean air. When I was in England once I had to spend a week in hospitals in Cornwall. In Cornish hospitals. I was told that they have an oversupply of doctors in Cornwall, and I thought why would that be? They're very small little villages and very small little places. Once again, it was exactly the same reason. They were there for the lifestyle reason. These were doctors that were of a really high caliber, they could have been very successful in London, but they chose to live in a better environment which is I think a situation we have here in Alice Springs. One that we could lose.

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Speaker 1: Yes, Professor Priestly.

Prof. Brian Priestly: Thank you very much for your presentation. Some of the people we've spoken to when they conceptualise the industry think only about the fracking wells, whereas others look at it more broadly and include things like the increased economic activity, the increase in employment, the increase in traffic and things like this which go with the industry. In the context of your concerns, have you thought about the possible impacts of things like increased traffic associated with this construction phase? It's something that we need to think about in terms of our risk assessments. Do you have any suggestions as to how we might approach that from the point of view of assessing the risks associated with increased traffic?

Domenico Pecorari: I don't know about increased traffic, but I really do believe that very few of the economic benefits will be for Alice Springs. I think the workforce, specialised as it is will most likely be fly in, fly out. The equipment, the trucks, the casings, everything will be made elsewhere. There isn't really going to be very much benefit here. Not even I believe any benefit of a community type, like increased activity in the local shops or increased numbers going to see art events at the Arluen. I think that there will be absolutely zero effect because of the way that the industry is run now, the way that it operates.

I think that the mine and miner, there may be some professionals, surveyors and the like may gain from that, but I think in terms of the damage and the risk which is taken by the local community, the benefits are simply not worth it.

Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper: Again, just following up on that. What you've expressed about benefits not actually flowing to the particular location where you are or where people are located has been expressed by many people. Quite understandably so. Do you have any sense of, again just looking at the collection of wells in and around Alice Springs, whether or not they are serviced by any people who reside in Alice Springs?

Domenico Pecorari: I don't know. I didn't even know about them. I will certainly be looking into them now. I think that they are just conventional wells if they are wells at all, aren't they?

Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper: They are, but nevertheless are at least 30-

Dr. Ross Smith: 34.

Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper: 34 of them have been fracked.

Dr. Ross Smith: Yeah.

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Domenico Pecorari: Unfortunately, I didn't even know about this, that's news to me.

Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper: Again, thank you very much for taking the time today to come and address the panel. We're very appreciative. Thank you.

Domenico Pecorari: Thank you.

Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper: We will now have a very short break where we ascertain the whereabouts of our next presenter. Thank you.