



Darwin – Seranna Shutt, Ron Chute and Ellen Gapany

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Darwin Convention Centre, Darwin

Speakers: Seranna Shutt, Ron Chute and Ellen

Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper: Welcome to day two of the second round of the consultations, the public hearings in Darwin. I omitted to do this yesterday, for which I apologise, but I wish to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land upon which we meet today, the Larrakia people. I pay my respects to their owner's past, present and future.

Seranna Shutt: Hi my name is Seranna Shutt and I'm just appearing for myself.

Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper: Thank you.

Ellen Gapany: Hi, my name's Ellen Gapany and I work for Aboriginal Interpreting Service.

Ron Chute:

My name's Ron Chute, I'm just here to assist Ellen and give an introduction for her.

Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper: Thank you, yes.

Ron Chute:

Ellen is a full-blood traditional woman from Milingimbi. She was born out bush under a paperbark lean-to. Nobody knows her date of birth. It wasn't until missionaries came along and estimated her age and gave a birth date. Ellen's father George, I'm allowed to say his name with Ellen's permission, was a highly respected man. Known as a peacemaker, he travelled all over Arnhem Land with his only daughter, Ellen, and one of his sons, James. Telling people that payback and spearing was going to stop. If we have a problem, we sit down, analyse the problem, and solve it without payback. Because of his tireless work, his funeral at Milingimbi had the biggest turnout of people anybody had ever seen. This respect was passed down to Ellen and her brothers. Anybody and everybody who knows Ellen have a lot of respect of her because of her knowledge of culture, traditions, and laws. Ellen is a qualified teacher who speaks 54 different languages. English being the 54th language that she learned. I call Ellen the Wikipedia of culture. Over to you, Ellen.



Ellen Gapany: I would like share with you guys as the panel, to throw questions to me and then I'll give you feedback.

Hon. Justice Rachel Pepper: Thank you Ellen. What we might do is hear all of the oral presentations first, hear what people have to say first. And then we'll, as you've seen, we'll ask questions. Thank you. Yes, Miss Shutt.

Ellen Gapany: Okay.

Seranna Shutt: Hi my names Seranna and I'm just a mum pretty much, and I really thought it was important that mums, family members, had a voice here. I'm not a professor, not a doctor, or anything like that. So a few years ago I became interested in finding out more about fracking. About four years ago I started looking for land to buy. My parents live in Tasmania and wanted to build a house. Haven't got that much money so I was looking in Tasmania, and then I saw some really cheap blocks of land in Queensland. In a place called Tara. My twin sister is called Tara so I thought, "Wow, this is amazing. Dream come true. I can go buy a 30 hectare block." I was just googling this morning, you can get 12 hectares for 25 grand; 30 hectares ... You can actually pay \$200 a week off a \$59,000 land. I think this guy's really needing to try to get rid of it. Because you don't even need banks or anything. And also 37 acres as well for \$29,000.

So I thought this is a dream come true. I though, "Great!" Then I thought, "Why is it so cheap?" And that's when I investigated and found out about the coal seam gas hub that's there in Tara. And that people wanted to get off the land. Get off their own land, leave their houses. And the more that I found out the more I was quite horrified about what was happening. I'm a mum of a 15 month old and I wanted to raise him in a safe, happy, chilled out, relaxed place. And then I found out, I read more about the unexplained seizures, that my twin sister passed away from actually in a seizure ... nosebleeds, skin conditions, migraines, severe fatigue. And attention; it was really hard for kids to focus at school. So my idea, my romantic idea to go to and buy a block in Queensland, was out the door about three years ago. Also I found back in 2001, they were worth about \$60,000. So the rates of the value of that land has gone down a lot. And I wouldn't want that to happen here in the Northern Territory.

So yeah, I'm not really talking about too much about scientific, I'm just talking about why I'm ... what got myself interested into this. And why it's important that we're talking about benefits versus risk. And I guess I ask, "Why?" Why now do we have to do this? Why not in 50 years, 100 years. Why not my grandchildren look into this later on when we maybe have some more feedback or more experiences to ... We've got plenty actually. Obviously, we've got plenty of experiences that we can have lessons learnt. So that's my five cents worth I guess, is that I really don't want the Northern Territory to end up like Queensland. Thank you.

Ellen Gapany: Yeah, I would like to ask a question. Why do you say fracking. I never learned that word in school, when I went to school. Never was introduced to



me by those missionaries as a teachers. So this is the first time that I've learned about the word fracking. What is it? Because my land, our land, has not been done by fracking people. We never use gas. We lived on land and land look after us. There were no drillings, anything like that. It's too dangerous. And it's not healthy for generations to come. Where will they be? Where will they hunt around for food? I'm a hunter. I feed myself from the land. When I'm out, out in the remote community, or visiting families or friends, I don't bother about shops. But I know food that's white man's food brought kidney problem, leprosy, toothaches, obesity, and TB. There was no one amongst the people that had those kinds of illness. With white people's food, and white people's activity, had damaged Yolngu people. Yolngu is me. We call ourselves Yolngu. We call you balanda.

I'm a traditional person. And I'm very strong in my tradition. I learn about my land. I don't carry around, carrying a map. My map is here. And I know which direction that I'll go. I was taught. I can speak language. I can write my language. And I can speak your language as well and I can write your language. I've learnt and I put myself in your shoes. Just to communicate through to the world. With my communication I will build up my relationship for better. Because I have not been with these groups, but I showed my interest to help and to support. Why should my grandchildren suffer from gas, oil, and fracking? Why should they build their house out in the ocean? And feed themselves with what? My future children are very important. And they'll live long to see their children and their children.

Our land is like a mother, a caring land. Feeds us, grows up, and we look after the land. We don't hurt land. 'Cause land is like your mother and my mother. It is very important. Land give us language, arts, sacred ceremonies. We perform, we teach children. And children learn and it's very important. If fracking goes on, children will lose their language, culture, tradition. And we have been here 60,000 years. Before white man people came. I am, and people out there in the communities, are the first Australians. Take into consideration. It is very important. Thank you.

Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper:

Thank you. I've got a question just before, which I wanted to ask Ellen. You said that ... you're concerned that fracking will cause our children to lose their language and culture. I just want to find out why you say that? How will fracking, do you think, cause your children to lose language and culture?

Ellen Gapany:

Pollutions. If you start fracking the places. Pollution comes up. Children will die. Or their parents will die, have illness.

Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper:

Thank you. Yes, Dr. Jones?

Dr David Jones:

Have you had any people from the gas companies come to your land to talk to you about what they might be doing?



Ellen Gapany: Not gas companies, but other companies, they were going to do the mining for bauxite. But area where my grandfather's land, or grandmother's, we said no. No touching the land. Leave the nature as it is.

Dr David Jones: Do you see any difference between like the bauxite mining and fracking?

Ellen Gapany: Yes.

Dr David Jones: In terms of what it means to the land?

Ellen Gapany: Yes. We want nature as it was made. We want nature to leave it for children to hunt around and feed themselves. When I hit the bucket.

Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper: Yes, any other questions? Yes, Dr. Ritchie? Yes.

Dr David Ritchie: Look, thank you for coming very much. And I know that some of the things that I might ... be in this question you might not want to be able to give me much detail. But it's very important for this committee to know about how you see the ... both what's on the surface of the land, like what you can see with your eye when you walk around, but what's down underneath as well, and whether you see what's underneath as important as what's on the top. Or more important or not as important?

Ellen Gapany: They're both important to me. Never dig.

Dr David Ritchie: Okay.

Ellen Gapany: Both surface and the bottom part is very important to me.

Dr David Ritchie: Okay. And when you say that, for my colleagues, when you say "me" you mean your ...

Ellen Gapany: All of us. Yeah. Me and the person behind me. Or the group that I'm from.

Dr David Ritchie: Thank you.

Professor
Barry Hart AM: Could I just explore that a little bit. I have no problems at all in understanding why the surface component is really, really important. Hunting, all of those activities you just indicated. Why is under the ground important for your group?

Ellen Gapany: It's far more beyond, because it contains something that is unique to us. Like for example, I believe in spiritual being because I believe, I'm a Christian, in Christianity terminology. But I believe my own spiritual being too. 'Cause what is underneath is within the sacred object and therefore I can't lift it up or dig it. Or expose it.

Professor
Barry Hart AM: Thank you.



Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper: Yes, Dr. Beck?

Dr Vaughan Beck AM: We have had some experience in talking to some Aboriginal groups, and this is not associated with hydraulic fracturing, but activities that have led to some jobs for the community. And it has been where there's been some destruction of land, and I can talk to you more about that later. But how important is jobs to your community? Is that important so that your children, your grandchildren, can have jobs? Because that's one possible beneficial outcome from hydraulic fracturing and extraction of gas. There are other things that you would say were disadvantages, and I understand that. But I'd just like to focus on the issue of jobs and the importance of that to your community.

Ellen Gapany: Jobs, we can create market gardens, fish industry, crabbing industry, or what is in the land. We can create that. Which we have started. With drilling we're not ... on for fracking. Fracking work can keep their jobs and their money. We want our land. And the job that we'll get, that won't hurt the land. 'Cause we've got lot of spring waters around. And no one will touch that. They're sacred. And they're for the uses of us. We uses that waters from the springs. And from the water holes.

Dr Vaughan Beck AM: Good, thank you very much.

Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper: Thank you very much, the three of you, for coming here today and speaking to the panel and sharing your views. We appreciate it greatly.

Ellen Gapany: Thank you.