



Darwin – Nicholas Milyari Fitzpatrick

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1 August 2017

Darwin Convention Centre, Darwin

Speaker: Nicholas Milyari Fitzpatrick

Nicholas Milyari
Fitzpatrick:

My name's Nicholas Milyari Fitzpatrick. I represent my people, Yanyuwa, and Garrwa people from Borrooloola. That's way out, probably 600 kilometres southeast from here. My voice is from out there, from my people.

This fracking ... I've been in the drilling companies. I worked around Borrooloola, a mob called Armour Energy. I went and worked for these mob because I was really concerned, what these drilling companies was doing in my country, in my grandfather's country, my grandmother's country. So I went and worked for them, and there was a lot of talk about fracking. But these mob weren't fracking. It's called conventional gas drilling. And I worked for them six months with the geologist group and learnt a lot about the geology of the country and all the stuff they're doing through drilling and how much it cost to drill. It's very, very costly for ... looking for them big pockets of gas, conventional gas drilling. But after getting to know these geologists that I worked with, they taught me a lot about hydraulic fracking. I asked them if they were doing hydraulic fracking in this country or if they planned to do it, and they said they didn't know anything about it ... these two young geologists.

And they said to me, "Nick, if they try and frack this country, you have to do your best to stop them." These are geologists, trained geologists. And I took that really deep. They taught me how they do the fracturing, like, the casing that goes down these drills, these drill holes ... The rock that you're fracturing down there is a lot harder than any concrete that could be created, so containing something with this concrete is just ... doesn't make any sense to me. You gotta drill down kilometres underground. You can barely get a drill piece down there. How are you going to contain something that explodes underground, five kilometres underground? How are you going to get down there and see what's really going on and tell the people what's really going on? We can't even get down there ourselves.

The way forward for energy, for us ... We have to look towards clean energy. I grew up on country. I'm very connected to country. I feel a lot of change happening out on the country. There's species going missing, species of



crab. There's massive mangrove die-offs. There's salt flats disappearing from water levels rising. We see this change happening. I'm out there looking at it all the time, and I get really worried. We're putting a lot of CO2 in the air, and Australia's one of the biggest for that, for the amount of people to the country. I believe we ... the whole world is talking about it. We have to make this transition. Conventional gas drilling, it's proved safe in the past ... costly. These companies want to go and find the shale gas because it's a lot cheaper. That's all it is. They don't want to spend money finding these big pockets conventional gas drilling. They just want to get down there, blast the shale gas, and just collect it all.

They're not thinking about us people in the country. We're the mob that's going to be first impacted with all this stuff. Someone said to me, "We need a voice in the bush that should come and speak." I've been working with a company, a climate action company, AYCC and Seed ... I'm not representing them here today. I'm representing my people, Yanyuwa people. But we recently just had a Power Shift down in Melbourne, and it's a gathering of about 1,000 young people from around Australia, all colours. And we're all concerned about this in Toronto ... make the transition into clean energy and renewables.

I believe, here in the NT, we have to push these companies back and tell them we don't want fracking, and we need to create big solar grids. We can create jobs from solar. We can start feeding our place up here, and we can do tourism better. We need to look after our country. This is the last frontier. Tourists love the Northern Territory. You think they're going to love it if we fracture the place and then gas leaks everywhere? Nah, they're going to move us all from the bush. They're going to move us all into the city. We're all living in the city ... well, mining companies can do whatever they want to our backyard out there because it's been contained ... this poison site ... no people can live there. That's what fracking's going to do. It's gonna open the gate for all these other mining companies to come in ... because we're the ones blocking them, people, living on land, and look after land.

I believe tourism is the way forward, as well as solar energy. We need to look into it and really build Aboriginal tour-guiding businesses with the right mob in remote places to make a tourism boom, all around. I don't know. I'm just a real passionate young fella, and I feel that this is ... it's hard to get me out of my country. I love it out there. I'm a saltwater man. But when I start to see change happening in front of my eyes, I travel. Like this Power Shift we done down in Melbourne, I just travelled from Borroloola, Darwin, to Melbourne ... Melbourne to Darwin ... Darwin to Alice Springs ... Alice Springs back to Darwin. And I was a bit late getting here. That's 'cause I just got here. I've been doing a lot of movement. It's for the future. We have to look after our territory. We can't let these mob come in and push us around.

For the gas, we can still do a bit of conventional gas drilling around the place, I believe, because it is a cleaner energy to ... the carbon, it's half as



much put out there. So there's still a way there, but not fracking. That's just benefiting the mining companies and leaving us with wrecked country, and our water is very precious. If a TO signs an agreement 200 kilometres from us ... them big water tables down there, they go way past 200 kilometres. So one TO or one clan group could actually wreck land for about eight clan groups around it. That's going to start all the trouble. You can't contain this thing like you contain conventional gas drilling. This thing is just ... you're breaking rock. That's the hardest thing in the world down there. It's really hard rock.

I feel that I had to come here to make it to this fracking inquiry ... I had to come back up all the way from Alice, keep driving, because I have to get my voice out there, heard, because I see change happening.

Thank you.

Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper:

Thank you very much, Mr. Fitzpatrick, and rest assured that we're just glad you're here so don't worry about being late by any means. Now, does anyone have any questions at all? We'll start with Dr. Ritchie and then we'll work our way down.

Dr David Ritchie:

Nick, if it's okay to call you Nick.

Nicholas Milyari
Fitzpatrick:

Yeah, that's good.

Dr David Ritchie:

What would help this inquiry, and we've asked some of the old people, but they're ... getting the cross-cultural communication is often hard, and I'm just putting it to you. To get this inquiry to understand how culturally important the underground is, as well as the surface ... I think everybody understands the importance of the surface and that's where all the food sources are, that's where the features that form the sacred sites are, all that. But underground, it's ... we were saying ... and I think we had a few questions. Just if you're authorised to be able to talk a bit about that to us, I think it would be very helpful.

Nicholas Milyari
Fitzpatrick:

The biggest ceremony in the Northern Territory that I know about, in my region ... it stretches from Doomadgee, Tennant Creek, Borroloola, to Roper River, and it's called a Gunabibi. This Gunabibi is a spring. It's a rainbow serpent, dreaming, and it's a really powerful one that connects all of these clan groups together and have one big ceremony. That spring, that rainbow serpent spring, moves underground. It's not on the surface. It shows up on the surface little bits here and there. This thing moves underground. You stop that water over in Borroloola, it's going to stop at Mataranka. This is the same spring moving underground. This has a huge significance to our underground as well, seeing the springs that are moving through there, the water. It's very important to our culture.



If you cut that spring off, the biggest ceremony, the Gunabibi of the Northern Territory, will shut down 'cause then ... our story is in the land, and you take that bit of the land away, you take that part of the story. You got a missing part of the story. It stops where that missing part is. That ends up hurting a lot of us, a lot of clans all across the Northern Territory. So that's our underground thing there, and there's a lot more as well ... underground roots of our creator, our rainbow serpent moving through underground springs.

Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper:

Thank you. Yes, Dr. Jones?

Dr David Jones:

Nick, I was interested to hear that you believe that conventional gas is okay. You said you were employed by a conventional gas drilling company?

Nicholas Milyari
Fitzpatrick:

I wouldn't say it's okay, but we have to make this transition. We have to be real, and I think we need energy.

Dr David Jones:

So you think that conventional gas extraction is much safer than fracking?

Nicholas Milyari
Fitzpatrick:

I believe it is much safer, yes.

Dr David Jones:

Is that based on your lived experience?

Nicholas Milyari
Fitzpatrick:

Through work, yeah.

Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper:

What makes it safer, Nick? I'm just curious.

Nicholas Milyari
Fitzpatrick:

Well, you're drilling down and you're finding a pocket of gas. The pocket's already there. You're just extracting the gas. This tight shale gas, you gotta go down there and create pockets. You're moving earth at a really massive, hydraulic level ... so much energy to break this rock down there and make these big pockets.

Dr David Jones:

So what you're saying is that that gas is there naturally, the conventional gas is, so it's disturbing the land more?

Nicholas Milyari
Fitzpatrick:

It is disturbing the land more, I believe, yeah, and the water, the water streams. And the cracks, the fractures, they don't move in straight lines. They're fracks. They're cracks ... go all over the place. But when you're drilling down, there's a neat hole going straight down looking for a big pocket.



Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper:

Thank you. Yes, any other questions at all?

Thank you very much, Nick, for coming today. We're grateful ... we have had a very busy time and done lots of travel, and we're grateful for your presence here today. Thank you.

Nicholas Milyari
Fitzpatrick:

No worries. Thanks for hearing me.

Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper:

Thank you.