

SCIENTIFIC INQUIRY INTO HYDRAULIC FRACTURING IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY



Territory Frack Free Alliance
Submission #412

Lauren Mellor

Via email: [REDACTED]

Dear Ms Mellor

I refer to your correspondence to me dated 14 August 2017. Please forgive the delay in responding to you. As you know I have been conducting consultations in regional and remote Northern Territory for the past several weeks. I respond to the matters you raised in your email below.

First, having spoken to [REDACTED], it would appear that your understanding of who would be communicating with Ms Diane Stokes is not correct. At no time did the Inquiry assume any obligation to call Ms Stokes. Notwithstanding this, the Inquiry, through [REDACTED], attempted, on multiple occasions to facilitate Ms Stokes making a video or oral submission to the Panel at Tennant Creek on 10 August 2017. Despite numerous unanswered telephone calls, it was not until the day of the hearings that [REDACTED] was able to speak with Ms Stokes, whereupon Ms Stokes told [REDACTED] that you were on route to her house to write down her statement to read to the Panel. Ms Stokes was told that approval would need to be obtained from myself for this course of action to proceed. It was not given. Attempts were made to communicate this to Ms Stokes, but again [REDACTED] telephone calls went unanswered. The hearings therefore proceeded that day, including all logistics arrangements, in the absence of Ms Stokes. This was regrettable but unavoidable given our inability to liaise directly with Ms Stokes. As was communicated to you at the hearing in Tennant Creek, there is nothing preventing Ms Stokes from submitting either a written, oral or video recorded submission to the Inquiry. Indeed this would be most welcome and will, once received, be loaded onto the Inquiry's website.

Second, the Inquiry has gone to considerable lengths, having regard to both time and fiscal constraints, to consult with as many Territorians as possible. We are more than cognisant of the barriers to participation that many people face with respect to the Inquiry. It is for this reason that we are visiting multiple locations across the Territory on multiple occasions, often with an interpreter from the Aboriginal Interpreter Service, assuming one is available (which is not

always the case). It is also why the Inquiry is encouraging participation across a number of different formats: in person, in writing, oral recordings or video recordings.

While more notice of the consultations would be always be preferable, this is dictated by matters such as venue availability, transport availability, accommodation availability, and even design and printing availability. In addition, I have given a commitment that the work of this Inquiry will be completed by the end of the year. The Territory deserves this certainty.

Third, I respectfully disagree with your description of an “apparent hostile reaction” and your suggestion that there was any “changed scheduling” in respect of the Tennant Creek hearings. There was no “changed scheduling” in respect of that hearing and, to reiterate, every effort was made to accommodate Ms Stokes’ participation given the logical constraints faced by the Inquiry on that occasion. Equally, I did not observe any hostility, only a statement repeated by both myself and [REDACTED] Taskforce, that it was simply not possible to accommodate your very late request to dial-in Ms Stokes at the hearing.

The Inquiry has engaged with numerous environmental organisations during the course of its work. Overwhelmingly this engagement has been constructive and positive and has made a significant contribution to the knowledge acquired by the Inquiry and will assist in shaping many of the recommendations ultimately made. I hope that this engagement will continue. Activity to the contrary is counterproductive and serves no one’s interests.

Yours sincerely



THE HON JUSTICE RACHEL PEPPER
Chair

31 August 2017