

Northern Territory Task Force on Hydraulic Fracturing

Dear Justice Pepper,

The question of water is ongoing and critical and I thought it might be of interest to the Northern Territory Inquiry team to read a chain of correspondence to the Editor of Queensland Country Life on this subject. (1st letter published 24 august, 4th letter on 5th October 2017)

Letter 1 is from Rhys Turner from APPEA

Letter 2 is from Basin Sustainability Alliance Chair, local farmer and vet, Lee McNicoll

Letter 3 is from Origin Energy Gas Well Maintenance Operator Andrew Levine
And Letter 4 is from Brian Bender, Chinchilla farmer.

I invite you to read the letters and determine your own opinion on who provided the most facts.

As pointed out to me by Mark Anning, there are additional facts to consider:

"a) no assessment on the impact to the GAB due to the depressurisation. That is, pressure alone plays a very important role in how the GAB survives, and this has been ignored, could the pressure play a more important role than the underground water alone?"

b) OGIA has NOT undertaken any modelling on the time it will take to repair the GAB due to the unlimited water take by the CSG industry. Will the time be circa 300years, 1,000years or if ever?"

c) Everything is connected to everything else...this reflects the existence of the elaborate network of interconnections in the ecosphere. The word "cybernetics" is concerned with cycles of events that steer, or govern, the behaviour of a system...this leads to the question, what amount of stress can this system absorb before it is driven to collapse? It would be logical to assess the GAB as a complex ecosystem, with multiple interconnections...so what happens when one part of the GAB breaks down, followed by the next and so on? Dramatic collapse, and given the complexity of the GAB, the outcome would more than likely be long-delayed effects!"

d) With regards to the salinity topic, in nature there is no such thing as "waste". Nothing goes away, it is simply transferred from one place to another, converted from one molecular form to another, acting on the life processes of any organism in which it becomes, for a time, lodged. One of the main reasons we are in an environmental crisis is that a great amount of materials have been extracted from the earth. The result, too often, is the accumulation of harmful amounts of material in places where, in nature, they do not belong. I would like to ask Mr Levine if he could demonstrate where the "waste" from cleaning the WCM water is being managed and disposed of?"

e) Nature knows best...this carries on from the above point. Earth has about 3+ billion years of R&D behind it (more R&D than the oil and gas industry has)...so to explain this, take for example how living cells synthesis fatty acids with even-numbered carbon chain lengths (4,6,8 etc), but not with odd-numbered carbon chain lengths; or, compounds that contain attached nitrogen and oxygen atoms are

singularly rare in living things...this warns us that artificial introduction of substances of this type would be dangerous...hence why DDT was nowhere found in nature. Nature knows best...this is why nature has trapped NORMS, heavy metals, gases, carcinogens deep underground as this is naturally the safest place to store such compounds and elements. The CSG industry is bring all those toxic substances and more to the surface where they simply do not belong!"

In addition, in the light of industry's claims regarding their supposed beneficial water usage and the reverse osmosis plant discussed by their proponent, I would like you to consider a further article published in the Chinchilla News.

- This confirms that in Chinchilla Western Downs Regional Council standpipe charges are among the highest in Australia at \$17.10 per kilolitre.
- Not only that, but 98% of the water from the Chinchilla community standpipe is taken by gas companies.

I would ask you to consider what is it happening here and why. The gas companies have access to vast amounts of raw water and have a RO plant to "clean and purify" it. Why should they have any need to take water from the community supply at all, let alone take 98% of the water from a community owned standpipe in a drought declared region?

How does that fit in with beneficial usage?

How would that translate to the Northern Territory?

Best wishes

Geralyn McCarron

8th October 2017

SAME MYTHS FROM ACTIVISTS

The green activist movement loves a good scare campaign. Sometimes the target is cotton growing or tree clearing by farmers and sometimes it's natural gas production, but we're all familiar with the tactics.

In a recent edition of *Queensland Country Life* we saw the same old myths from the Western Rivers Alliance that fracking and natural gas production are going to poison water and ruin farmland. Time and again these claims have been debunked by Australia's leading scientists but that doesn't stop them being repeated.

The green activist movement wants traditional energy sources banned. They don't care about the cost to the families and businesses that rely on reliable and affordable energy.

Anyone who has toured the Darling Downs recently can see the region is thriving. Data from the University of Queensland shows that the region's transformation into a globally significant source of natural gas has delivered major economic benefits for the community. Personal and business incomes are higher and towns like Dalby now have some of the lowest unemployment rates in the state. Last year the gas industry directly and indirectly supported 40,000 Queensland jobs. In contrast to the apocalyptic claims of the Western Rivers Alliance we see a gas industry providing 50,000 megalitres of water to farmers and the community last year alone. Over the last five years farmers who host gas projects have received over \$300 million in direct payments from the industry. And we are now seeing a second wave of investment in renewable energy projects in the Darling Downs off the back of the energy infrastructure built by the gas industry.

These are the legacies of Queensland natural gas. No-nonsense Queenslanders are smart enough to see through pseudoscience and scare campaigns.

- Rhys Turner, Australian Petroleum Production & Exploration Association, Qld Director

LETTERS TO THE

INVITE TO DISPEL 'INCONVENIENT TRUTHS'

The Australian Petroleum Production and Production Association's Rhys Turner's attack on those diabolical green activists (QCL Aug 24) is long on industry rhetoric but very short on a truthful analysis of the unsustainable legacy that the "unconventional" and coal seam gas industries are leaving on the aquifers of the Great Artesian Basin (GAB).

The Basin Sustainability Alliance is very concerned that Mr Turner appears particularly ill informed on the unsustainable and arguably irreversible impact on GAB aquifers that the CSG industry is having.

The State Government's own Underground Water Impact Report 2016 solely for the Surat Cumulative Management Area, estimates that the CSG industry will pump out 5-6 Sydney Harbour volumes over the next 50 years from the Walloon coal measures and other inter-connected aquifers of the GAB.

No amount of compensation or "make good" arrangements will reverse this irreversible damage to our priceless underground "water bank" that underpins agriculture west of the Great Dividing Range.

Mr Turner needs to understand that the unlimited taking of 50,000 plus megalitres annually from underneath the majority of landholders and providing a minority with "beneficial use" water is inequitable and depletes the "water bank" for future generations. BSA members don't enjoy contemplating the hydrological and other negative impacts of the CSG industry. We have a highly credentialed speaker list at our AGM in Chinchilla on Oct 13 and cordially invite Mr Turner to attend to hear the latest science on some "inconvenient truths".

- **Lee McNicholl BSA Chair, Arklow,
Dulacca**

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Queensland Country Life

August 31, 2017

Harbour volumes of extra water that farmers could not use previously that they now can.

That takes pressure of the use of the good water that's already there. As he says 50,000 megalitres a year that now will not be drawn from the clean water in the GAB.

The other thing that was not mentioned is that there is 500m to more 1000m of impervious rock between the wooloons coal measure and the pure clean water in the GAB that is normally used by farmers.

Common sense would say if they were connected that the salty water would of mixed with the clean water long ago. The CSG industry does not draw on the clean usable water for any reason.

Often when not all the information is presented wrong conclusions can be made.

Andrew Levine, Antigua, Qld

MCNICHOLL'S LETTER LACKING ON A FEW FACTS

It was interesting to read both the letters from Rhys Tyner 24 Aug and Lee McNicoll on the 31 Aug about the impacts of coal seam gas on the GAB. Both had some very interesting information.

Lee McNicoll however left out some very important points. He is quite correct at the amount of water that may well be drawn out of the Wallons coal measure. What he neglected to say was that the water is salty and unusable for farmers in its natural state. The water however is cleaned and purified by the CSG companies through a large reverse osmosis plant and given to farmers for irrigation, released into rivers so down stream landholders have extra water to draw on, or injected down into usable aquifers for farmers to draw from. So, over the 50 years as Mr McNicoll states there is 5-6 Sydney

LETTERS TO THE

I WOULD like to respond Andrew Levine's letter supporting unlimited water take by the CSG industry. His opinions are clearly influenced through being a fly-in-fly-out Origin gas well maintenance operator. As a Chinchilla farmer and livestock producer, I, like the owners of the other 1646 Walloon Coal Measure aquifer bores in the Surat Basin, currently use and rely on this valuable shallow water for livestock production.

I would ask Mr. Levine to stop regurgitating industry spin if he wishes to engage in sensible debate with farmers. It is totally untrue when you claim that "the WCM water is salty and unusable for farmers in its natural state".

To reiterate, WCM water is generally ok for livestock production but unsuitable for irrigation as are many bores in all other GAB aquifers due to salinity. The Government's OGIA model predicts that the WCM will be de-watered up to 300m long term. "Make Good" provisions means that CSG destroyed landholder bores need relocating to the deeper, much costlier to drill Hutton's aquifer. This in turn may compromise sustainability of the Huttons.

It's blindingly obvious that using "cleaned and purified" WCM water for inefficient, subsidized short-term irrigation is unsustainable in the long term. It is only accelerating depletion of the GAB "water bank". To improve your understanding of CSG's impact on the GAB, I am happy to provide you with a copy of the 2016 OGIA Report which clearly shows connectivity between the Springbok and Huttons aquifer with the WCM. It is recommended for in flight reading.

- **Brian Bender, Hopeland via Chinchilla**

Residents question standpipe charges

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WESTERN Downs Regional Council standpipe charges are among the highest in Australia at \$17.10 per kilolitre.

The council's standpipes are used to provide potable water across the region.

In comparison to Western Downs' \$17.10/kL, Warwick pays \$6.30, Lightning Ridge pays \$3.15 and TasWater charges \$1.57.

According to the council, the standpipe customer pays the same total cost for the supply of water as any other connected customer, except that it has to be paid on a per kilolitre basis and has to include any additional costs incurred by the sale by standpipe.

A council representative said gas companies purchased 98% of the water from the Chinchilla standpipe and the remaining 2% went to households.

Chinchilla resident Karen Auty believes the excessive water price boils down to one issue.

"My problem is, it's happening because of one industry that's owned by foreign companies," she said.

"It's the little people who are suffering through dry times who have to pay and

“It's the little people who are suffering through dry times who have to pay – and that's not right.”

— Karen Auty,
Chinchilla resident

that's not right.”

Ms Auty said there had been a big jump in prices in the past four years.

"I'm guessing there was a big jump when a lot of industries came to town," she said.

"Water trucks fill up at the Chinchilla standpipe and it does a roaring trade, especially as households on tank water run low in dry times, like now.

"My hope is that people are outraged enough to start a residents and ratepayers association to get numbers and strength to tackle this as a group," Ms Auty said.

"I can't see any other way forward."

A Western Downs Regional Council representative said residents could claim a 50% discount on standpipe water charges if it was used for drinking purposes or if their



PRICE HIKE: Chinchilla's standpipe services the gas industry and households who are lacking potable water. PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

property was drought declared.

All of the Western Downs is currently drought-declared and has been for almost three years, therefore every resident is entitled to the discount.

The 50% discount would make it \$8.55/kL, still much more than most other council areas throughout the region.

A statement from the Western Downs council said no economic return on water was received and the council was the only local government that billed water and sewerage separately that did not achieve a return on water.

"To a large extent, council's inability to achieve any form of return is driven by its lack of scale, brought

about by the number of small towns council has to service," the statement read.

In 2016-17, revenue from standpipe water across the council was about \$1.1 million.

A council representative said Western Downs Regional Council expected about \$1 million of standpipe water to be sold this financial year.