

fracking inquiry

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To: fracking inquiry
Subject: Supplementary submission - questions and comments - Jean McDonald
Attachments: Supplementary submission_Jean McDonald_Word version.docx

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Attached is a brief supplementary submission to the Scientific Inquiry, containing some additional questions and some comments in response to the recent final stage of the inquiry's community consultation process.

I appreciate the care taken by the panel members to inform the public as well as possible about the potential risks and benefits of a fracking industry.

As a person who is now aware that 'exploration' involves fracking from the beginning, I am even more convinced that all stages of the proposed SREBA process would need to be completed (on a site-specific basis) and inquiry recommendations implemented BEFORE any further 'exploration' takes place.

Jean McDonald

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Supplementary submission to the Scientific Inquiry into Hydraulic Fracturing in the NT – Jean McDonald

I am grateful to the panel for taking the time to brief the community on their activities and findings so far, in detail and with great courtesy. Panel members have been unfailingly patient and very generous with their time.

I took part in consultation sessions at two stages of the process, and found the briefings were informative but also thought-provoking.

For what it's worth, I now have some final questions (for which there is probably no time to provide answers), some comments and some recommendations to make.

QUESTIONS

- Do the recommended 'set-back' distances take account of local weather conditions and changes in wind direction for likely well sites?
- If not, is it possible with further detailed information to set site-specific 'set-back' distances for each well?

Reason - I understand that people living in urban areas where emissions drift in plumes far downwind from certain petroleum industry facilities have been found in the past to face higher than usual risk of disease (eg particular leukemias in children), while others living closer are at lesser risk.

- How long would it be reasonable for contaminated water to be retained in surface tanks? Is it known how and where would it be disposed of?

COMMENTS

Trust issue

It is unrealistic to expect that a regulatory regime designed to regulate a gas extraction development with optimum environmental protection would survive a change of government in the NT. Ours is a parliament with only one house and few members. The balance of power in government swings when small changes occur in voting patterns. It is easy to see that a change in the market that perhaps threatens the viability of a fledgling gas industry will have the capacity to force a change in the legislation that governs it.

Petroleum and fossil fuel industries have powerful friends in the Federal Government. Australia is currently governed by a party that provides considerable financial incentives to, and visibly favours, fossil fuel industries (as evidenced by Coalition politicians passing around a lump of coal in Federal Parliament). The Federal Government is quite openly campaigning to have the Territory's moratorium

lifted and has quite openly and publicly threatened the revenues of the Territory Government if the gas extraction industry is not allowed to proceed.

How industry might gain 'social licence'

I think it is fair to say that the petroleum industry generally does not have the confidence of ordinary citizens concerned about the environment and the climate. Its commitment to the community generally is suspect, and seen as basically self-serving.

The industry receives enormous benefit from Government by way of tax advantages for exploration and other subsidy payments. Some (for example, Santos) pay no tax in Australia (see <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-12-07/corporate-tax-data-released-by-ato/9236878>).

Their public relations industry clearly lobbies government successfully and achieves access that would not be possible for individual opponents.

It is also campaigning and advertising heavily in the Territory. However the industry representatives are not being frank and forthright in their communication with ordinary citizens, particularly when it comes to the 'exploration' phase.

As an ordinary citizen, I think concerns about the industry would be alleviated somewhat if the industry itself committed to

- the implementation of all the recommendations spoken about in the draft report, word for word, and
- awaiting completion of base-line environmental studies (of water, soil, air, plants, animals and people) before any further exploration takes place.

Previously I thought exploration meant geologists hiking around the Top End, exploring the landscape. If that was the case, deferring baseline studies until after exploration takes place would not appear to be a problem. That's the line the industry representatives are taking and probably most people in the community have accepted it.

Thanks to the panel and the community consultation sessions, I understand better that exploration requires the drilling and fracking of a certain number of wells to explore their potential.

This is a serious concern because it requires a scaled-down version of the production stage. A number of roads would be made, there would be heavy vehicles involved, large quantities of water would be taken from the environment, there would be noise, emissions and toxins released and the disruption to residents and the environment would be the same as if a small scale production operation was underway.

In fact a very large development is likely, if the industry is allowed to operate in the NT. We are told there could be around 1200 wells, and there is a risk that at least one of these will fail to the extent that chemicals contaminate the environment (all-

well failure risk of one well in 1,000 approx). One of these exploration wells might be the one that fails!

Who should pay for baseline studies?

The NT's population opposes this industry, and the NT should not be responsible for work to permit its operation.

At first instance, it is clear that the Federal Government, which is pushing for this industry to have access in the NT, must pay. Work should be carried out by CSIRO or some other trusted, objective scientific organisation at arms-length from industry and the Federal Government.

The industry might eventually be made responsible for baseline study costs if production goes ahead.