



## ***Darwin – Janette Hintze***

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***Speaker: Janette Hintze***

Janette Hintze: I'm Janette Hintze. I'm not really appearing on behalf of any organisation, but I'm appearing in perhaps representation of a group of people who will be seriously affected if the unconventional fracking goes ahead in some of our horticultural areas. I am, myself, a farmer and have been so for 40 years. I've also been on the council of the NT Horticultural Association, and for a time there was the President. I was the 2006 NT Rural Woman of the Year. I'm a member of the Howard Springs Water Allocation Committee, so, I have to do with water a fair bit. Not only do I use it extensively in my own business, but I also have responsibility to some extent at least with a number of other people on the allocation of underground water supplies in the Darwin rural area.

I have several points to make about the whole idea of this scientific Inquiry. I won't go through the long list of points of discussion of damage to the environment, aboriginal rights, water pollution, damage by access roads, pollution by stores of chemicals, fuels, human habitation, disruption of wildlife by roads and fences, disruption of the pastoral industry by the same roads and fences, as well as the intrusions of strangers onto pastoral properties, which is not particularly popular even on a good day, and an extraction of water in vast quantities, I mean, a million litres per frack is a huge quantity of water to be pulled out of largely un-accessed ... unassessed, sorry, water aquifers. We have enough trouble assessing how much water is available around the rural areas of Katherine and Darwin. They've been studied extensively, but a lot of these more remote areas, the underground aquifers really haven't been quantified. There's no actual serious knowledge about how much water there is there to be used, and how often, and how easily it is to be recharged.

The reliability of scientific evidence supporting the fracking, since it is provided largely by sources that have a vested interest in the outcome of the Inquiry ... As a historian, which I've been trained to do, I was trained to assess the value of evidence by taking into account who provided it. There is a truism that the winners write the history books. People who write reports are often, perhaps unconsciously, tending to write what they think people want to hear. This principle needs to be applied to those that are providing the evidence on both sides of the argument, of course.



Everybody's got a vested interest to some extent, even myself, even though I'm not in any position and connected with the industry. Those supporting it stand to gain an immediate commercial benefit. Those against it concerned by the permanent loss of the entire territory environment. It's a loss to the Territory people, a loss to Australian people, and to the world community. To some extent, I think we all owe a bit of responsibility in that direction.

Promises by interested companies that all will be well, that the science is infallible, the engineering is sure and reliable, the profits are enormous, and there will be jobs for all, and speaking as just an ordinary person who's a farmer, these are the things that we read in the papers. We see them on the social environmental whatever that you listen to, Facebook and all the other things. Quite frankly, we don't believe them. We know that engineering fails, bridges fall down, houses fall down. They burn down to the ground, because they're built out of the wrong materials. All sorts of things go wrong where people were promised, it's fine. It'll be okay. All will be well, and we'll supervise it anyway and make sure it's all right. It doesn't necessarily happen that way, and, in fact, it nearly always doesn't. There's always something goes wrong. Someone made a mistake or whatever.

Past evidence has shown that the reassurances by the mining operation is not that reliable, when you consider the number of toxic and derelict mines scattered throughout the territory and Australia, the mounting evidence worldwide of the damage to the environment, the pollution, the earth tremors, which has led to a large number of countries and states within countries banning fracking operations. Why should the Territory suffer less than they? We are so dependent on our water supply, perhaps because we have a small population over a huge area. I mean there's only 200-odd thousand of us, really, when you start counting. A good percentage of those, particularly those who live in the rural areas between maybe what you would say Palmerston and Alice Springs, are violently opposed to this. Maybe we're wrong. Maybe we can believe all these things that they're saying. But, really, I don't know that very many people do.

It would appear, too, that the amount of gas extracted from one of these operations is a very small percentage of the gas production from traditional methods. The reason for the demand of this gas has been contracts for export of all the gas currently produced have been entered into, leaving a shortage of gas in Australia. Therefore, it would seem appropriate that we consider this as a temporary measure. We actually in the Northern Territory have enough gas for our requirements. Why do we need to destroy our countryside, potentially, for more?

Promises of thousands of jobs would be somewhat of an exaggeration we feel. All the people that I speak to, we sort of look at this prospect of drilling hundreds of many kilometres deep holes, it's not a job for the average person who's around on the unemployment benefits here in Australia, in the Northern Territory. It's jobs for highly technical people, engineers, drillers, even high-level truck drivers. There's not too many around that are qualified to drive trucks carrying all of these dangerous chemicals. You need special drivers for that. You need to make roads over all sorts of areas of the



countryside to shift all the steel that's going to be needed for the casings and the cement that'll coat the outside of the casing, at least to some depth.

So, that these roads themselves are going to cause an enormous disruption to the pastoral industries and to some of the aboriginal cultural areas that they are crossing. Invariably, accidents happen. Cars run off the road. It rains, and they all get bogged. All these sorts of things. We've had amazing numbers of accidents caused in the tropical zones of Australia purely because it all got too wet, and it got too hard. People who aren't used to working in these sorts of areas find it very difficult to take that type of thing into account. They have schedules they have to keep come hell or high water. The monsoon rains ... I mean we got a major rain last month, and that makes a hell of a difference if you're trying to put down a drill hole.

So, the promise of these thousands of jobs would appear to be somewhat of an exaggeration. Even so, these jobs would be generally highly skilled workforce of drillers, engineers, heavy equipment operators, geologists, and chemists, probably all of whom would come from outside the territory, and probably from international consultant sources. Although, of course, if they're living here, they're spending their wages here. That's a bit of a boost to the economy, but it doesn't really solve any of the problems of our own personal developments and developing the skills or what have you, of our current existing workforce.

The next thing that we're all a bit concerned about is the supervision of the mining operations. Supervision here in the Territory has always been a bit, 'how's your father?', due to largely the lack of staff and funding in leading to the failure of rehabilitation when the mines are abandoned. I mean, the place is scattered with gold mines, and copper mines, and iron mines, and this and that. You come across a great big hole in the ground, and you think, oh, I wonder what that was? If you ask, somebody will tell you, "Oh, that was so-and-so's copper mine, you know." It's still there, and it's still green 100 years later.

Promises by political proponents that the work will be closely supervised to maintain the standards, but the standards are often set by the companies that are actually providing the work. The cost of this supervision of thousands of wells or hundreds even, will be enormous. That will be paid for by the taxpayer, because it would have to be provided by a semi-independent, at least, operator, which would be probably the local mines branch.

To acquire the qualified engineers with the experience, and perhaps liking towards travelling around the rural areas of the Northern Territory, and looking at all of those things to make sure that they're doing whatever they're supposed to do, and it's all working as it should, that's not going to be an easy matter either. We're talking possibly of years of development here before it even gets to the point where you can say, "Okay. The supervision might be adequate." What sort of problems are going to arise in that sort of situation before we get this qualified workforce available to supervise the mines?



I guess I've come to my final point here. The inherent risks of all the above negative outcomes have been assessed as moderate and controllable. I would like to have you consider with any degree of risk to our long-term water supply, to the environment, which is one of our major tourism and recreational assets, to the pastoral industries, and the agricultural and horticultural operations, which already exist, is it reasonable to have any sort of a risk for that?

What always must be kept in mind is that unlike most other areas of population in Australia, the Northern Territory water supply is entirely dependent on the underground water supply. The rainfall in the Territory is extremely seasonal and depends on the northwest monsoon. At other times, there's little or no rain at all. So, you have months where you must, for whatever you're doing, whether it's fracking, or growing melons, or whatever, hay, you need to have access to clean water, not water that's muddied up with chemicals that have moved in from the 10 kilometres away fracking operations. You need to have clean water.

I know Greg and the people from the NT for Farmers made that emphasis that it has to be clean to support the clean and green reputation of the pastoral, and horticultural, and agricultural industries, which are already hugely valuable when you consider the millions of millions of dollars that they turn over each year split up amongst the very small population we have. It's amazing that they've been that efficient over this time of development. It's unreasonable to me and to most of the people who live and work in that area, that it should ever be put at risk. Even the Darwin City actually gets 16% of its water from the underground aquifers, so, that it's not only the Darwin River Dam filling up with the monsoon rains that are the ... Thank you ... that are the issue. For the major population area of the territory, it's a serious consideration as well.

If things go wrong with these highly technical and dangerous operations, as they invariably will, the damage done will be irrevocable. You cannot decontaminate an underwater aquifer, as the Defence Department has discovered in Katherine and various other places around Australia. You cannot purify the toxic polluted water which is emitted from the bore hole along with the gas. You cannot guarantee the dams holding this toxic mess will not be flooded during wet season rains, which are often very unpredictable. You cannot remove the damage done by the roads crisscrossing the pastoral country, the disruption to the movement of stock, the death of stock on the roads, the lack of water availability to these legitimate long-term industries because of the water being diverted to go down a hole and come back poisonous.

The indigenous occupations and owners of the vast amounts of the land in question have significant and important needs for access to the land, and the desecration of their country would do untold damage to them and their culture, and they too are completely dependent on clean water. You can't live in the outback without it, which is why they've mostly been nomadic until we came along and started drilling bores.



It seems to me to have faith in advice put forward by people and organisations who have a vested interest in the outcome of the inquiry is a foolhardy exercise. The risks are high, and the possible damage is irrevocable. I recall the old joke about the man who jumped off the Empire State Building. When he was at the 20th floor, someone said, "How's it going?" He said, "So far, so good."

- Janette Hintze: We should contemplate what happened at the end of that tale.
- Hon. Justice Pepper: Thank you very much. Now, I notice that you were reading from what looked to be a typed document.
- Janette Hintze: More or less.
- Hon. Justice Pepper: More or less. If you are happy to do so, it would be great if you could submit, make that as a written submission to the inquiry.
- Janette Hintze: I can do that, certainly.
- Hon. Justice Pepper: Wonderful.
- Janette Hintze: When do you need it by?
- Hon. Justice Pepper: Sooner the better.
- Janette Hintze: Okay.
- Hon. Justice Pepper: We're due to report in March, so, obviously the sooner the better.
- Janette Hintze: Yeah. I'll get it to you by the end of this week.
- Hon. Justice Pepper: Oh, wonderful. Thank you very much.
- Janette Hintze: It's just a matter of recopying it, adding the bits that I made up as I went along.
- Hon. Justice Pepper: No, no, no. Yeah. You raised a lot of very important points, a lot of points that have been raised in various ways by the people. It was very comprehensive and very crisp, which makes it an excellent resource.
- Janette Hintze: Thank you.
- Hon. Justice Pepper: So, if you could turn that into a written submission, we'd be very grateful.
- Janette Hintze: I will.
- Hon. Justice Pepper: Thank you, any questions?
- Janette Hintze: Yes?
- Hon. Justice Pepper: Yes, Dr. Anderson.



Dr. Alan Anderson: Just a point of clarification. Thanks, Miss Hintze. Your comment about ... that the analysis in the report seemed to be based on information provided by people with a vested interest. Just wondering if you could provide a bit more of information. I mean, in a sense of the report includes information from industry, but that's really mostly just about what their plans are for development, not in assessing particular risks. Virtually all the information that we've got for that, which is our major task, is from peer reviewed published literature from scientists. You're including that information as vested interest, or if you could perhaps clarify what you mean by that.

Janette Hintze: I guess that my point there was that we should be aware that people who are giving advice or data, et cetera, on either side of the argument, need to be identified as which side they're from. People who are working with, paid for, on a research grant from some of the oil companies and what have you, of necessity need to declare that type of ... where they're coming from. The same goes for people who are looking for a sensational story, and go around setting fire to rivers and all that sort of thing. Sometimes, they're not all that unbiased either.

It's very hard if you're a member of the general public not accessing the scientific data that you guys have. We get our information from the local newspaper, and an article in The Australian, and a TV program on the ABC, or whatever. You really don't know what side they're all on. They're just looking for a story or whatever. It's very confusing if you're out there as somebody who just reads a newspaper once a week, because you didn't get to town to pick up the other ones. You end up with very fractured ... The general result is, you don't trust anybody because you don't have any of the real data to back it up.

Your report was excellent in that it did give a lot of interesting information, but a lot of it was way over my head. It's not easy to explain these things, I'm sure, in terms that a layperson, particularly one with an arts education, has to back it. So, the end of it is you just think, okay, no, it's all wrong. I won't listen to any of you. That's the common attitude out there. I don't know what this is, but I'm not having it, is where they're going.

To me, even with the small amount that I have learned over the weeks and weeks of listening, and looking, and reading as much as I can get hold of, the risks are just too great. Engineering isn't perfect. These fracking things, just looking at the reports that are coming in from America, and from Holland, and from earthquakes in Britain, it's just so widespread. The reports are coming in of the damages and the pollution. I mean, the Northern Territory is not the most stable seismic place in the world either. If you start making huge cracks five kilometres down in the ground, what does that do to the general attitude, the geology of it all?

Hon. Justice Pepper: Thank you. Thank you for taking the time to inform yourself in the way that you have. I appreciate that. You are quite right. They are complex scientific concepts. Some of the data behind them is complex. The scientific reports are certainly not easy. I'm a lawyer, and I fully acknowledge that. I don't



have the technical expertise that some of background of the Panel here do. I accept that it's not necessarily easy to navigate your way through it.

Janette Hintze: A lot of people just can't and don't, which is partially I think the reason for a lot of the violent opposition to the whole idea, is that it just seems too dangerous. No risk is acceptable. No compromise is acceptable for the water supply. That's our position I guess.

Hon. Justice Pepper: Thank you. Thank you very much.