



Darwin – Justine Johnson

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Speaker: Justine Johnson

Justine Johnson: How you going?

Hon. Justice Pepper: Miss Johnson, if you could please just state your name for the recording, if you're appearing on behalf of an organisation, the name of the organisation as well. If not, just your name will do. Thank you.

Justine Johnson: My name is Justine Johnson. I'm 35 years old. I've lived in the Northern Territory my whole life. I'm not appearing for any company. I'm here for my children. I have four children. We've lived in Humpty Doo for 14 years and we do rely on bore water there. I had a lot more that I wanted to say, but I feel like so much has already been covered of what I had, so I'm going to just try and cover other stuff, because you've already answered some of my questions. I really love the territory lifestyle at the moment. The pristine waterways, I even love crocodiles, so I don't want you thinking that I panic at danger. There's so much to enjoy between fishing, hunting, bird life. The birds are incredible. They're a bit of a passion of mine.

I love swimming. I love walking amongst the gorges. I am disappointed about what's happening in Katherine. I understand that's separate to this as well, but I do love the fact that in general apart from there we don't have the threat of contaminants, and I can feel quite safe with my children going in all of those areas. We go camping a lot too. I would actually like to see a complete ban on unconventional hydraulic fracturing across the Northern Territory because I still don't believe there's enough evidence to show that it can be done safely. What I'm seeing at the moment come from Queensland is really scaring me, because I've read articles about cows dying, about health impacts with respiratory diseases, well, not so much diseases. Bear with me, I'm really nervous.

Justine Johnson: Stay at home mum. The best I do is talking in front of playgroup.

Hon. Justice Pepper: You're doing terrifically. Just treat us like you would your children and you'll be fine.

Justine Johnson: You might not want that.

Prof. Barry Hart: Says something about us.



- Justine Johnson: I do have some questions, so I understand if you can't answer them. I'm just wondering why in the inquiry phase before the report was actually handed down were you not able to actually get a list of the chemicals from the gas companies? I do feel that I'd feel more comfortable with the recommendations if we knew what we were actually dealing with. Is that not-
- Prof. Barry Hart: They're in the report.
- Justine Johnson: The chemicals are.
- Prof. Barry Hart: Yeah
- Justine Johnson: Okay. Well, I actually only got a chance to read the summary, because [Akesia 00:27:14] couldn't get the full copy to me until the 12th. Four kids, school holidays, didn't read the full report. Where is that, in the water section?
- Prof. Barry Hart: I might say, sorry.
- Hon. Justice Pepper: No. Go ahead.
- Prof. Barry Hart: I might say that that's particularly focused on the fracking chemicals, and not on the ones that are coming back from the shale.
- Justine Johnson: None of the naturally occurring stuff.
- Prof. Barry Hart: We do have information on that. It's just not in the report at the moment.
- Justine Johnson: Okay. I'll read chapter seven, I believe that is.
- Hon. Justice Pepper: Seven. Chapter seven. Bearing in mind this is a draft report. The whole purpose of these consultations is to get your feedback, tell us what you think, and the report will undoubtedly alter ...
- Justine Johnson: Amended.
- Hon. Justice Pepper: Yeah. It'll be amended between now and the final report.
- Justine Johnson: That's good to hear. I have to say after reading the summary I was surprised that in the press conference you said that if the recommendations were adopted and if all the fracking could be done safely, and I found that hard to understand just given what I read in there, there was so much uncertainty and the lacking of baseline testing. That's where I do feel that the public felt that you were more for it and that's the impression I was given. Just saying my feelings here. Speaking with friends, they felt the same way. It's not just me that feels that way. With regard to some things that were said today as well about the public not really being aware of what fracking is, there's a lot of confusion about the type of fracking that's being done. People think, "Oh, fracking's been around for 50 years. It's fine."



From everything I've read, hydraulic horizontal fracturing is only about 10 to 12 years old. Is that right?

Prof. Barry Hart: Bit longer.

Justine Johnson: Yeah? Because I just feel that's quite young for an industry, and for what I've read on them there's enough data to show that it's not safe anyway. I'm not a scientist, but that's just how I feel. Reading about the naturally occurring radioactive materials were actually enough to make me cringe. That where I really, really wish that it could just be left right down there trapped under the clay where I believe it's safe right now. Alarm to cook dinner, that one? Sorry. Doesn't have silent for that. Water kids and dinner. Sorry about that. I would prefer to see that dangerous waste left below.

How can a well actually be mitigated when it is actually leaking, and then what are the ramifications long-term? Plugging it with concrete, concrete doesn't last forever either, so I am concerned that even like it's way, way, way down there where we can't actually see, is there a way of putting in place something, I don't know, wires or something to show when something's still going wrong that, hey, it's been closed up after we've finished live fracking and we've got a problem. We need to do some fixing on that? Those aquifers are still going to be used for consumption, so that's a concern of mine, because it is so far down. Having a husband who works in mining and seeing what they do, you can see that "I can't see what's going on down below," and that really scares me.

No. That's covered. Water extraction. Now, here where I live I've seen bores going dry, not this current season but the previous dry season bores were going dry, because we're running out of water in the aquifers because water's actually being extracted to supply town as well. I just wondered where you had said there wasn't enough data to show recharge on that Beetaloo Basin, is it possible to use data from that to show how much water Darwin's actually using, how well it's recharging? I tried to find data on how much water Darwin's using, but I can't, so either I'm not typing in the right Google thing. I'd really like to see that, because if you've got some sort of data you can show how well it is going. We've all been flooded recently. You've seen that.

Hon. Justice Pepper: Badly.

Justine Johnson: Yes. There's plenty of alternatives. I don't think we even need to frack. If it's gas you want, can we not just get it offshore? I know it's more expensive, but it's obviously more environmentally safer to go offshore, so I think we could spend the next few years looking at baseline testing, checking the aquifers and how well they do recharge, see what continues to happen in Queensland before the government decides to make a decision. Renewable energy, that's been said as well. It is on the increase and I do believe renewable energy will be the next revolution. There's so much new technology around it that it's madness not to utilise it, especially when we're talking chemicals.



My daughter's got epilepsy. No one knows why she's got epilepsy. The doctors cannot tell me. Now, we live in an environment where slowly more and more chemicals are being used. I've gone organic. Many of my friends have. We don't use chemicals in our home now to clean. I use alternatives, microfibers and vinegar, which I know is really not good for the nose though. You still got to be careful with it. If you want to eat organic food, you really don't want to be doing fracking because you've got too many chemicals that are going to end up in the environment where they're going to be grown. Water is for life. Yeah? Yeah. It is. Then we've got up here barramundi farms, cattle farms, pastoralists, fishing, and tourism, these are all industries that are the backbone of the territory and people who have worked really hard to make the territory where it is now.

The tourism industry alone has over 16,000 employees. I would hate to see them at risk just for a little bit of gas that we can be getting elsewhere and we have alternatives to this. It honestly makes no sense in my head. It's unfair to put those risks for those jobs for temporary jobs for fracking which causes permanent damage. The 115 risks are real. I also believe prevention before medicine. I don't know how we can do it in a safe way, but I would like to see some more tightened regulation rather than just recommendations. Obviously all you can hand down is recommendations. That's my concern is then the government turns around and what do they choose to adopt from those. I just still don't feel that's quite enough.

Where are we? I am concerned about the little animals. When you've got evaporative dams that are full of chemicals, and there's no way to keep the animals out of them, especially birds. Birds flying around those areas where it's quite arid, there's not water all year round everywhere like it is at the moment. At the moment we're pretty safe, but come dry season when you've got smaller sources of water they're going to go to those, they're going to drink. They're going to die. We've got threatened species. I can send them to you as well if you want, if you do want a list of those threatened species in that Beetaloo area.

Hon. Justice Pepper: Absolutely. Thank you. Yes. That would be good.

Justine Johnson: Just a couple that I wrote down today. Hang on. We've got princess parrots, northern quoll, floodplains monitor, and there's heaps more. They were a few that drew my attention, because the northern quoll's already under threat here still because of cane toads. That's right. It is sad, but the parrots as well, they're probably the most vulnerable parrots, frogs, any sort of reptile, because they ... With frogs their skin, you can't even touch a frog without hurting it really. Anyone who handles frogs would either be wearing gloves or as myself and my kids we do wash our hands. We've watched a programme on ABC and it's all very ... They breathe through their skin, so it's a real risk for them.

I do worry about things like that, and even the flaring when that occurs. I don't even want to get to that stage though, so I did want to focus on the beginning that this is ... Immediately it's not going to be good for any of those little critters that right now myself and my four children and my



husband, that's what we go to see. I am forever, we are wandering around and looking at every little living thing, even moss. There's something in everything out there, and growing up on it I want to see it that way. I don't want to stand on Ayers Rock and see a flare. I don't want to fly over places that I've flown over right now and see gas fields. I think it looks disgusting. It's like the cancer of the earth. I really don't want it to happen. I don't know what I can say to stop it, but I really don't think that what they're wanting to extract and get from it is enough to substantiate what you're going to leave behind.

When this is done and dusted, my youngest child won't even be 30, if we're looking at a 25, 30 year. That's what I'm basing it on. It'd be a shame to see all that damage when he's my age.

Hon. Justice Pepper: Thank you.

Justine Johnson: I want to keep it beautiful.

Hon. Justice Pepper: I've got a question. You said you wanted to see tightened recommendations.

Justine Johnson: Yes.

Hon. Justice Pepper: What did you have in mind? Can you give me some examples?

Justine Johnson: Look, when you in the report summary ...

Hon. Justice Pepper: That's all right.

Justine Johnson: It's more based on what's acceptable, acceptable levels. At the moment there's no chemicals in the water, and it concerns me when I read an acceptable level, because with the PFAS this is how I am understanding it, is that it got to a level that wasn't acceptable before they even told the public, so people were already drinking and being exposed. Let me see if I can find an example. What I might do, because I've got a million things highlighted is can I send you an email with the point and what I'd like to see?

Hon. Justice Pepper: Yeah. No. We would absolutely welcome that.

Justine Johnson: It is more what I am reading are recommendations of monitoring rather than seeing actual mitigation, and I want to see how things will get fixed when it happens as opposed to just we're going to ask you to employ someone to monitor the water, and if it leaks we'll just make sure it's at a safe level. Hang on, what's going to happen to mitigate that leak? Things like that. I'm assuming the email address is still the same as ...

Hon. Justice Pepper: Yes.

Justine Johnson: Would I address it to you or just the inquiry panel?

Hon. Justice Pepper: Just the inquiry. Just the inquiry. That's fine.



Justine Johnson: I'll refer to some specifics.

Hon. Justice Pepper: We would actually really appreciate that. Certainly, in fact you've raised an issue that we keep raising with the gas companies that come here, which is, well, what happens if something does go wrong? What are you going to do to fix it? How will you fix it? To which the answer is usually, "Oh, but we'll have all these wonderful measures in place to ensure nothing goes wrong." In which case we then ask the question again, well, let's just assume that something has gone wrong, what are you going to do to fix it? I think it's a really important question, which with great respect to those that we've heard from by way of the gas companies hasn't yet been satisfactorily answered with the level of detail we'd like. It's a good point.

Justine Johnson: That's my biggest thing. Awesome.

Hon. Justice Pepper: Thank you very much. We'll look forward to that, ...

Justine Johnson: Thank you.

Hon. Justice Pepper: ... those further points.

Justine Johnson: I'll email [crosstalk].

Hon. Justice Pepper: That now concludes the first day of the public hearings in Darwin. Thank you.

Justine Johnson: Thank you.