



## ***Alice Springs - Vicki Gordon***

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**Alice Springs Convention Centre**

**Speaker: Vicki Gordon**

Vicki Gordon: Yeah. Good morning. I'm Vicki Gordon, and I, firstly, would like to acknowledge the country that we are on, and the elders, past and present.

My background is as a nurse. I've lived and worked in remote indigenous communities for 18 years, and currently working in public health advocacy, and education and practitioners new to remote. So, although my accent might indicate otherwise, I've actually lived in the Territory for nearly 30 years, and I'm really passionate about the environment, and social justice.

I'd just like to say, upfront, that I strongly feel that there should be a ban in place, on unconventional fracking, and the focus needs to be on renewables in these times, as Germany, Spain, China, and Brazil are doing now. I read with interest the initial part of your report, regarding Rachel Carson's Silent Spring, from 1962. That's actually even more relevant now, as we're confronted with many issues.

One related to what that particular topic was recently around bees, and Bunnings were pulling the Yates Confidor, because of the effects on the bees' immune system, and disorientation. Other major issues: deforestation, and feral cats. I feel like there's, almost, the nation, it's like, we can't pillage fast enough, and I feel like the state of the economy can be seen as a reason for doing this.

In these climate change times, it was interesting to read the Australian Institute of climate and energy state, that if shale gas was fully exploited in the NT, that would be the equivalent of 130 new coal power plants, over 40 years. Reading the report, there's some great recommendations, and it was good to hear you say about, that many of them are, already, include the exploration phase, and some don't, but probably need to.

So, the SREBA, the Regulations Code of Practice, Mitigation of Risk Monitoring Compliance, but I kind of ... I have a, kind of, severe lack of trust that there's not the key, or the will, or the capacity, to undertake this. The risks seem so great, and with so much of the NT under exploration, it concerns me greatly.



The recommendations that I felt were really good were 7.11, talking about the enclosed tanks for wastewater; 8.7 and 11, regarding the rehabilitation post-operation; 8.11, regarding the burial of pipelines; 9.4, regarding methane monitoring, funded by the industry; 14.4, the no go zones never available for exploration; 14.7, the regulatory framework, enforceable codes of practice; 14.12, the Environmental and Rehabilitation Bonds; 14.11, the company's environmental and compliance history be taken into account, not only in Australia, but overseas; 14.29, referral of the onus of proof, with regard to environmental harm; 14.25, in relation to whistle blowers, and the hotline; 14.30, increasing fines for noncompliance; 14.1, full cost recovery system phase, the gas industry to pay, to cover the regulation costs; and finally, the separation, 14.31, separating the regulators and promoters.

I saw with interest the other day around the Amungee Well deformation, and there seemed to be some discrepancy there, about reports in relation to that. I recently read an article in the Guardian Weekly, by Matthew Taylor, talking about the links between the shale gas boom and the plastics crisis, that cannot be ignored. We have an awful legacy here in the Territory, I believe, in the form of McArthur River, who were fined \$700 for smoke pollution, Mount Todd tailing dams overflowing, Rum Jungle uranium leakage, and abandoned unrehabilitated mine sites scattered throughout, including Tenant Creek area, and those sighted flying into Darwin.

In relation to water, we live in a largely arid, semi-arid, especially in Central Australia, area, and the sheer volumes of water required for this activity, I feel like there's a real risk of depletion, and contamination, and those risks are too great. Some communities are already struggling with supply. An estimated 20,000 fracking wells need 400 billion litres of water. So what has to happen to that colossal amount of contaminated water? As it said in Recommendation 7.16, it's not to go into drainage lines, waterways, temporary stream systems, or water holes.

Other concerns I have, relation to the chemicals used. Exposure, a lot of those areas, and some remote areas, the exposure to these chemicals. What happens to the solid waste? The industrialisation of the landscape. I kind of feel like, wonder about the effect on wildlife, because I strongly believe that we should be sharing this planet with other species. As previous, the first speaker this morning has said, concern about the greenhouse emissions.

I read that there are, there can be, up the effect of 50 trucks a day, for one well. I just think about the state of the roads already, in some places, and the effect on communities, and wildlife, the transportation of chemicals, and motor vehicle accidents.

With regards employment, renewables also can create employment, and this industry, and other mining industries, have also been affected by the boom and bust. The benefits can be short-term, and flow outside, while the costs, on all sorts of levels, can be born by the NT.

The health effects are of concern, too, and there've been a lot of peer review studies linking fracking and exposure to public health, and



environmental risks. I feel like, as the first speaker said, about people in the community relying on the media for more information. I feel like there's a reliance, maybe, on people being distracted, or busy, and some of the things that have actually been said, by people in the media, is an insult to people's intelligence.

I have concern about the corporate taxes not being paid, some of these big companies, and the view of the number of places within the NT, that are stating their opposition to it, I don't feel there's a social licence to do so. People need to be listened to. There's a growing number of places where a ban or a moratorium is placed, and is in place. France, Germany, Scotland, and two provinces in Canada, and three states in the U.S., as in the final report, but there's also, Argentina, Wales, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Czech Republic, Romania, Bulgaria, Spain, and Victoria, and here in Australia. In the NT, we have had the Adelaide River, Wagait Beach, Katherine, and more recently, the Alice Springs Town Council speak out against it.

I was involved in a door knock, in Old East Side, here in Alice Springs, where 80%, 89% percent of people, households, were against it. There's currently a petition happening, as well, in another part of town, and that's got several hundred signatures on it already. I remember well, the pastoralists, in the lead up to the election, having a full page in the NT News, stating their opposition to this industry. The Northern Territory Public Health Association, I believe Rosalie Schultz spoke yesterday from there, and the Catholic Social Justice Awareness Group have spoken out, as well.

I feel like the energy industry in this country has been, just disgraceful, in regard to the lack of consideration of domestic consumption, and thus, because it's being exported, and so, it's been used to put pressure on the Northern Territory, and Victoria, and before for our Prime Minister to come out and say, "Pull the trigger," I dislike immensely.

In relation to indigenous people, I was at the Elliott Gathering in late September, early October, and there was a young woman and an older man, who were just crying, because they're so worried for their country. The feeling of helplessness, at times, was just palpable.

Not only in this area, but in other areas, too, in relation to indigenous people, there's not enough proper information given in a way that, with the use of interpreters, considering world view on very complex issues, there's not enough paid to that area. There's also the link between stress and anxiety, and increasing chronic disease, of which we have a huge amount happening here in the territory, and indigenous population.

So, finally, I just want to say that, again, I believe there should be a ban in place, and we should be focusing on renewables, as there are many benefits of that, not just for the environment, but also in relation to jobs and businesses. We need to do this for future generations. I've already heard it said, as the two other speakers, in relation to young people, the legacy we will be leaving behind us, when we're all gone. Thank you for listening.



Hon. Justice Pepper: Thank you very much, Miss Gordon, for your presentation. Considered and detailed. Just one thing I just wanted to clarify. I think you mentioned the discrepancy around reports concerning the deformation, with respect to Amungee Well. What did you mean by that?

Vicki Gordon: I saw a presentation, I'm not sure who it was by, because I only come in partway through, what seemed like, some information was left out in one report. And in another, there was some confusion about that, actually, what happened with the Amungee Well, in relation to that deformation.

Hon. Justice Pepper: Okay. I would urge you, all I'll say is, I'd urge you to go and have a look at the recording, which is on the website for that particular day in Darwin. It was day two, in Darwin. There was a presentation by Ms. Hogan, on behalf of Lock The Gate. She suggested some type of potential cover-up by Origin, in relation to the existence of two diagrams, one which had some information in it, and one which didn't.

Vicki Gordon: Yeah.

Hon. Justice Pepper: Subsequently, the inquiry, and a statement by Dr. David Close, of Origin, cleared that up. Indeed, there certainly was no cover-up whatsoever by Origin, which the inquiry accepts. The information had been in the public domain, since the 25th of December last year, for all the world to see. The information was provided for different purposes, to the inquiry, and that's reflected in the reports, and Ms. Hogan was invited to clarify or retract her comments.

Sorry, if I said 25 December, I meant 25 May, 25 May, 2017. So the existence of the two diagrams in question has been in the public domain, since the 25th of May, 2017, so it's not some new discovery by anyone. As I said, and there was a subsequent clarification by Dr. Close, about the inquiry, and then, a further comment by Ms. Hogan, later on that day.

Vicki Gordon: Okay, thanks for that. Like I said, I only come in partway through, and I guess that's part of the vagaries of social media at times.

Hon. Justice Pepper: Yeah.

Vicki Gordon: Thanks for that. I'll look that up.

Hon. Justice Pepper: Just, don't believe everything you read in social media, is the bottom line on that one.

Vicki Gordon: Yeah, that's right.

Hon. Justice Pepper: Yes, quite. Any questions at all?

Vicki Gordon: No.

Hon. Justice Pepper: All right. I wouldn't mind, just, taking you back to, because, I think you said you've attended some meetings in Elliott. Is that right?



Vicki Gordon: Yeah, there was a gathering in Elliott. I can't remember if it was late September, early October, on Beetaloo Station, and then, there was a march, in the township of Elliott itself.

Hon. Justice Pepper: Okay.

Vicki Gordon: So it was, sort of, over a weekend, people gathering around fracking, and yeah, it was pretty moving, really, to be present. Because it was a majority of indigenous people there, from that area, and to just a handful of non-indigenous people. I happened to be in Tennant at the time, so I went along to it, yeah.

Hon. Justice Pepper: Okay. Certainly, the community meetings that we have held, in Elliott, and Jilkminggan, which, we previously held them, which we'll hold again next week. Certainly, the people who have attended those meetings have spoken out, and largely, Aboriginal people have spoken out against fracking. They've spoken out and presented all sorts of very cogent, powerful reasons why they don't want this, and the panel has taken note of that, and will continue to take note of that.

Vicki Gordon: Okay, thank you.

Hon. Justice Pepper: Again, thank you very much for your presentation today.

Vicki Gordon: Excuse my nervousness.

Hon. Justice Pepper: No, oh, no, no. It was a flawless performance.