

Dr Allan Hawke AC
Commissioner
Inquiry into Hydraulic Fracturing in the Northern Territory
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Dear Dr Hawke,

Hydraulic Fracking

I wish to associate myself with the comments of the Northern Territory Environment Centre, and I reproduce the points made in their proforma submission below.

My position is that hydraulic fracturing should be completely banned. It is highly irresponsible for any government to be promoting the expansion of the fossil fuel industry at a time when the earth is beginning to experience in devastating form the consequences of global warming by carbon dioxide pollution. If the average temperature of the earth increases by more than 2 degrees Celsius, the earth will probably be uninhabitable by human beings, and there is a significant risk that this will occur. This grab for more gas is based on short term, blinkered thinking and an appallingly greedy grab for cash as quickly as possible by the resource sector. There are plenty of other better industries that could be promoted in the Northern Territory, that are non polluting and that are value adding. The mining and resource sector does not add any value to the broader economy. It is not innovative, but purely exploitative. It is damaging to the environment. In a self serving manner, it always makes exaggerated claims about job creation and wealth generation, and never admits to the damage that it does. The gas sector in other states has shown itself to be ruthless and anti-democratic. This thinking, this unbridled pursuit of money at any cost, disregard of social and community values and destruction of the natural environment are terrible outcomes for Australia, and we will live to rue the day that we allowed greed and stupidity to triumph over common sense and respect for the environment.

Yours sincerely

Mark A Zanker

I wish to submit the following concerns about hydraulic fracturing in the Northern Territory.

- The history and high risk of failures and accidents associated with fracking across the world demonstrates that it threatens the health of our rivers and aquifers.
- I believe that the risk of fracking is too high and the potential for serious long-term impacts too great to be compensate for the short-term financial benefit to the Northern Territory.
- The high level of water use by mining companies which is not controlled by the Water Act, meaning mining companies do not need to seek a licence to extract water for fracking.
- Industrialization and fragmentation of our pristine bushlands, which are our biggest asset in terms of both biodiversity and providing for the livelihoods of many Territorians.
- The impact on the landscape since one shale gas field typically contains many wells connected by pipelines.
- The risk of gases seeping out into our aquifers, waterways and bores.

- Health impacts of fracking caused by the contamination of our air and water.
- The lack of responsibility by mining companies to protect the health of the surrounding environment and communities.
- The lack of information about its potential cumulative environmental, social, health and cultural impacts.
- The devastating impact it could have on our fishing and tourism industries
- The devastating impact it could have upon sacred sites
- The social impact of industrialization turning our regional and remote areas into gas factories.

I ask the Inquiry to respond to the following questions:

1. The EPA has stated that there are too many wells to assess individually and that the NT Government does not have the resources to ensure compliance. Will companies be required to undertake environmental impact assessment of each well?
2. How can the community have confidence in the government to be able to make informed decisions based on the science and not just the hard sell from mining companies?
3. Have any independent studies been undertaken to properly assess the impacts of fracking in a tropical monsoonal environment?
4. How will the potential health, social and cultural impacts of fracking be assessed?
5. Who pays for environment clean up if fracking allows gas to leak into the groundwater and more methane to be released into to our atmosphere, contributing to greenhouse gas emissions?
6. Do mining companies have the right to come on to any pastoral lease, private freehold or native title land and frack for gas without free, prior and informed consent by the landholder?
7. Where landholders do have a right to veto, or to compensation, how is their decision process informed?

What will happen to the millions of litres of contaminated waste water?

8. Who benefits financially from fracking?
9. How will mining companies be subsidized or incentivized to frack using taxpayer dollars?
10. How can people living in remote communities contribute to this Inquiry?
11. How will commercial interests be represented in this Inquiry?
12. Will any forums be held to discuss issues raised by the Inquiry?
13. Will the Inquiry acknowledge that both mining companies and governments have a vested interest in allowing fracking to go ahead despite the risks it presents, and the bias that this presents?
14. How will the results of this Inquiry be reported and enacted?
15. Who will ensure mining companies comply with any guidelines formed as a result of this Inquiry?
16. If I have concerns about fracking activities taking place on my property, who can I contact?

I call on you to make recommendations for:

1. Ensuring that any fracking development takes place according to the Precautionary Principle for Ecologically Sustainable Development and that this is incorporated into the relevant legislation.
2. Funding an independent scientific study which properly assesses all impacts (environmental, health, social and cultural) caused by fracking both interstate and overseas to assess the risk to the Territory.
3. Independent assessment of the climate impact of fracking, including fugitive emissions.
4. A moratorium on all fracking until all of these risks have been properly assessed by independent scientists.
5. Assessing and establishing permanent 'no go' zones for sensitive areas as reserved blocks under the Petroleum Act (eg. Drinking water catchments, cultural or environmentally significant areas such as sacred sites or protected areas, groundwater recharging zones, food croplands)
6. Ensuring the onus of proof to demonstrate that fracking is safe for the Territory's environment and communities is borne by the mining companies rather than landowners, including the collection of baseline data prior to any impact.
7. An open, transparent process for information to be provided and distributed throughout communities.
8. Mining companies must obtain free, prior and informed consent from all landholders as per best practice management.
9. Mining companies undertaking fracking must be required by law to respond to the criteria for environmental impact assessment as per any other significant development.
10. Water use by mining companies must come under the Water Act so that companies taking water for fracking are required to apply for a water extraction licence.
11. Proper resourcing of monitoring and compliance bodies such as the EPA and Department of Mines and Energy.
12. Provisions to ensure that the mining company bears the financial and moral responsibility for any negative impacts caused by fracking.
13. The NT Government ceases the use of taxpayer dollars to provide subsidies and incentives to mining companies for the purpose of exploration, extraction and rehabilitation.