

fracking inquiry

From: Luke Playford [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, 19 February 2018 10:02 PM
To: fracking inquiry
Subject: Fracking inquiry comments

To the fracking inquiry panel,

I recently attended the presentation of the draft final report in Nhulunbuy. I found this session to be quite informative about the process of fracking and the risks involved during the various stages and procedures. The panel were able to expand on the information provided quite well when further questions were posed regarding various parts of the operation. Based on all that I have learned about fracking, I have always been deeply concerned about this gas extraction method, due to the risks it poses to the environment and the likely contamination of ground and surface water.

The panel presented the chances of many undesirable outcomes as “low risk”, when measures are put in place to mitigate high risks. The N.T. has had a shocking history of environmental disasters in mines due to the inadequate government environmental monitoring of mines within the N.T. coupled with absolutely inadequate bonds to put into environmental remediation work following environmental problems.

Obvious examples are:

- Radioactive wastewater not contained within Ranger Uranium Mine, flowing into Magela Creek and associated floodplains.
- Radioactive waste and heavy metals flowing into the Finnis River from Rum Jungle Uranium Mine – ongoing.
- Cyanide leaks at Mt Todd Gold Mine up to 500 000 litres of cyanide released into Edith River
- Leaching of lead and other heavy metals into the water table at McArthur River Mine, and a toxic waste heap that spontaneously combusts. This mine has a rehabilitation plan of 1000 years. Who is going to honour any rehabilitation commitment beyond a few decades, if that?
- Redbank Mine contaminating Hanrahan’s Creek and well beyond, with copper sulphide. This has continued for 20 plus years with no government intervention to stop the contamination, or to hold the companies responsible to account for the environmental pollution they have caused and continue to cause.

The N.T.s poor history of regulating mining activity has resulted in long lasting, costly environmental impacts and this continues through to the present. I don’t see how the fracking industry will be any better regulated and held accountable for its impacts when things go wrong. The following are the main points I would like to make after attending the Draft Final Report presentation.

Treatment of waste water – I found that the panel were not adequately able to explain what would happen to the waste water generated by the fracking process. We were told that the waste water would not be stored in open dams, but would be stored in tanks on site. While this is obviously a lot safer than open dams, where seepages and exposure of contaminated to wildlife would be unavoidable. I would firstly like to know the size and amount of tanks required to achieve this, it must be an incredible quantity and take up a massive footprint. When questioned about what would happen to the water in these tanks, there was no clear answer. I asked if it could be processed, to remove toxins. I was told that this was possible, but that the water would have to be trucked to a facility that could carry this out and that would be cost prohibitive. I don’t consider that storing vast quantities of water in tanks for eternity is in any way a logical, responsible plan for managing toxic water. Anything toxic produced by this fracking process needs to be managed for eternity, not for a few years. The integrity of tanks will not last forever, therefore there will be release of toxic water at some stage if the water is not removed from site for treatment/processing. If the water was to leak, then there would obviously be severe risks to the environment through soil, surface water and possibly ground water contamination. This risk is unacceptable in my eyes and is not a “low risk” under the current plan for waste water

management. The recommendations should call for removal/processing of all wastewater produced in all phases of the fracking process to protect surrounding land, surface water and ground water from a high likelihood of spill at some stage of the storage of this toxic water.

Air pollution – The panel presented the recommendation that wells not be anywhere near human habitation, recommending appropriate “set back “distances. If this decision has been made due to human health risks associated with airborne gasses, vapours or dusts, then I think we should look at how these may affect animals – particularly cattle and native wildlife. The Beetaloo Basin is largely pastoral properties as with many proposed fracking areas. If health risks exist from being close to the wells, then it could be assumed that health risks exist for other animals. I wonder what the health risks are of consuming beef that has lived close to these wells for extended periods. I also wonder how this may damage the pastoral industry if consuming meat from these animals was found to be a real health concern.

Government regulatory bodies – We had some discussion about there being little confidence in the NTG being able to be in any way effective in regulating this industry in the N.T. It is clear that our history in monitoring and regulating environmental breaches and impacts is appalling. Any regulation of this industry needs to be independent of government and needs to be adequately funded and resourced to do their job effectively. The fracking industry should fund this regulatory body. There needs to be a study of how much it would cost to rehabilitate worse case scenarios relating to fracking pollution of land and water. Environmental bonds need to be set at these rates so that when there is a disaster the bond can actually cover the remediation, and compensate those affected. The regulatory bodies need to have the compliance power to enforce fines on offending companies that are actually reflective of the costs associated with the environmental damage caused, and the clean-up costs.

Thanks for the opportunity to express my concern,

Luke Playford.