

(second DRAFT) Desert Fruit Company Submission for Inquiry Into Fracking

The Desert Fruit Company is a cooperatively owned and run farm 68km south east of Alice Springs. We manage around 700 date palms, selling locally, Australia wide and have just commenced exporting overseas to the Middle East. We rely solely on a bore for watering the dates and they require a lot of water when grown agriculturally. Our bore also supplies the 8 individual shares of the cooperative with domestic water.

For us, water is our major concern because without access to fresh clean water we are unable to continue our farming lifestyle. We are seriously concerned about the effects of hydraulic fracturing on the water we rely upon. Fracking has already been proven to be unsafe for water quality in Queensland (<http://www.smh.com.au/environment/toxins-found-at-third-site-as-fracking-fears-build-20101118-17zfv.html>). Because we cannot see our aquifer we wouldn't be aware if it was being geologically compromised or polluted with chemical seepage or gas, but it would be a catastrophe for us.

A document by the Centre for Human Rights and the Environment (CHRE) titled 'Human Rights and the Business of Fracking-Appling the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights to Hydraulic Fracturing, 2015' clearly state that injecting large volumes of water and chemicals into the ground to force fossil fuels out of the geology (commonly known as fracking) has been proven to cause severe air, land and water contamination. This document outlines evidence of burst underground well casings contaminating aquifers and poisoning drinking water. The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has also recognised in its recent assessment of the impacts of fracking on water resources that well casing frequently fail and impact on underground water, river systems and thus drinking water resources (EPA June 2015, P. ES14). Fracking has thus been termed an environmental catastrophe and the most controversial industrial practice of our time (orchr.org/Documents/Issues/Business/ForumSession4/FrackingAndUNGP.pdf).

Other concerns our farming Cooperative have are the treatment of farmers in the Eastern states by gas companies, the proven economic loss and the social and emotional well being of ourselves and the wider community. Fracking has a severe social impact on individuals and entire communities. We had a visit from a farmer from the Darling Downs in Queensland who told us about the social disruptions the industry is causing in that community.

Another recent example of this is the incredibly tragic story of the Queensland farmer who took his life as a direct result of the harassment he endured confronting the industry over a 10 year period (<http://www.mamamia.com.au/george-bender/>).

(<http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/queensland/senator-glenn-lazarus-calls-for-csg-halt-after-farmer-george-benders-death-20151015-gka88a.html>). A report in Queensland shows farmers were at risk of economic loss through the introduction of this Industry and for every job created through CSG, 1.8 jobs were lost in agriculture

http://www.lockthegate.org.au/nt_economic_risk_zone_onshore_gasfields_and_fracking_pipelines. Swapping food production for dirty energy at a loss does not make sense.

There are many the issues we are concerned about relating to pollution as a result of fracking; from groundwater contamination, to methane production and increased climate change, the enormous volumes of ground water used to frack wells depleting the water table, and the inadequate management of the huge volumes of toxic chemicals in tailings ponds including potential run off and further environmental contamination. We have a climate of extremes here in Central Australia and the last few summers have shown severe flash flooding. There has also recently been a report from the United States detailing the large increase in methane released in areas of shale gas and coal seam gas extraction and its increased impact on climate change, as well as leaked methane 'clouds' which can form making communities nearby sick

(orchr.org/Documents/Issues/Business/ForumSession4/FrackingAndUNGP.pdf)
(<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/2016GL067987/abstract>)
(<http://www.smh.com.au/environment/climate-change/sleeper-issue-of-leaking-coal-seam-gas-fields-may-blow-hole-in-emissions-goals-20160622-gpph1q.html>)

The Desert Fruit Company believe that because the choices we make today about our use of the natural environment bring unavoidable consequences to present and future generations, we are calling for an immediate and complete ban on fracking Australia wide as well as transparent and long term evidence based strategies to guarantee protection of our water - our most important agricultural resource.

Yours Sincerely,

Darren Turner and Esther Nunn

Representing
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