

Submission to the Scientific Inquiry into Hydraulic Fracturing of Onshore Unconventional Reservoirs in the Northern Territory.

From Coal and CSG Free Mirboo North

We wish to submit the following information and concerns to the Inquiry into Hydraulic Fracturing of Onshore Unconventional Reservoirs in the Northern Territory.

1. No system is fool proof
The risks associated with fracking are unacceptable.

In theory, hydraulic fracturing may be safe, if everything in the process of building the well and fracking for gas works perfectly. However, there are too many opportunities for (human) error in the process and it is therefore unsafe. In a review of 1200 scientific papers into Hydraulic Fracturing, the US Environmental Protection Agency found that fracking contributes to the contamination of the water supply at every stage of the process. Also, the findings demonstrated that in certain conditions spills or injections of hydraulic fracturing fluids resulted in large volumes or high concentration of chemicals reaching groundwater resources. (<https://www.epa.gov>).

A further US study analysed the reports of more than 75,000 state inspection of gas wells undertaken in Pennsylvania since 2000. The study showed that older vertically drilled wells (those drilled before 2009) had a leak rate of about 1 percent. Wells drilled horizontally have a leak rate of about 6%. (<https://phys.org>).

Industry figures show that between 5 and 7 percent of all new oil and gas wells leak (Oil Field Review). What evidence is there to demonstrate that the proposed fracking of the Northern Territory will not have the same leak rate?

2. Clean up the old mess before you make a new one

Where gas wells have leaked they have not been cleaned up. Across the world, there have been “no go” areas created because gas wells have leaked. In submissions to the NT Scientific Inquiry, energy companies say that the current technology reduces risk of leak and should a leak occur, the effects of the leak will be mitigated. However, this does not happen in practice. Consider Chinchilla in Queensland, a gas leak was not reported and the consequence is that 350 square kilometres of land cannot be used in the same manner prior to contamination. There are numerous other examples of contamination of water supply directly attributable to hydraulic fracturing activity (for example, there have been reported leaks in Queensland, Victoria, Colorado, Pennsylvania, Texas, West Virginia, New York, Alberta, Norway and many, many more). It would be reasonable to demand that before an energy company seeks to make further exploration then that company (and all of it’s subsidiaries and directors) is required to repatriate any land or water spoiled by previous gas mining.

3. There’s not enough water

Australia is the driest continent on the planet and in the dry season, the Northern Territory has very limited water resources. In the US, it is estimated that since 2005 fracking has used 3 million litres of water per well. (<https://www.huffingtonpost.com>). We do not have the water resources to operate hydraulic fracturing. Such water resources, if diverted to agriculture could be invaluable to famers.

4. Don’t frack the land rights

Indigenous leaders in the Northern Territory have made their opposition to fracking clear (<http://www.abc.net.au/news>). These people have lost so much to Western economic interests. We should demand that energy companies respect the land rights that the indigenous people have and that they should not employ divisive approaches to gain access to the land.

5. Most people don't want fracking.

Ordinary people, without vested interests do not want to see fracking operations in their district. They do not want to boom and bust mining cycle and the long term poverty that is the result for some people. There is an understanding that mining towns are impoverished economically, socially and culturally. The NAPLAN data available from the MySchools website demonstrates this. Referring to primary schools data in Chinchilla, 43% of students are in the bottom quartile. In Gladstone South 42% of students scored in the bottom quartile. These results are replicated for many towns. It is difficult to understand that there will be economic benefits for most of the people when this data is taken into consideration.

We ask for these concerns to be taken into consideration in the Scientific Inquiry into Hydraulic Fracturing of Onshore Unconventional Reservoirs in the Northern Territory. It seems that the Federal Government is putting undue pressure on politicians and government organisations to support fracking when the people do not want it.