



Tennant Creek – Seed Indigenous Youth Climate Network

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Tennant Creek

Speaker: Peter Dixon

Peter Dixon: Thank you, your honour, and thank you [inaudible 00:02:08] for all your hard work. My name is Peter Dixon, I too would like to acknowledge that we are on Waramungu country.

So my name is Peter Dixon, I'm just a resident at Tennant Creek. What I do with my time is I am a volunteer helper at the Australian Indigenous Ministries church, which is an Aboriginal church. And my main task there is to learn Aboriginal culture, and how that expresses in a Christian world. I just want to make a short presentation. Firstly talking about my understanding of Aboriginal world-view, and secondly making a point that the baseline studies that your panel has rightly recommended should go first before any further exploration. And then my perspective from having lived most of my life in Sydney and the last couple of years in the Northern Territory, I cannot see how the Northern Territory can effectively regulate anything. And I know many people have said that, I just want that to be reinforced.

Hon. Justice Pepper: Thank you.

Peter Dixon: So firstly, I've said the Aboriginal world-view as I understand it to mine the land and waters is to spear family. I've heard some of the presentations to your panel, and I've talked with many of my indigenous friends, and we white fellas have a different world-view from Aboriginal people. So I also want to make the point that your recommendations, 11.3 and 11.8, are extremely important and must be given absolute emphasis. My second point, very brief, is that unless the baseline assessments that your panel is recommending I make first, there will be relentless pressure to get mining and fracking going. And my third topic will be that the Northern Territory does not seem to be very good at regulating anything. I'll just give a couple of simple, basic illustrations of failures in regulation and infrastructure in the short time I have lived in the territory.

So on Aboriginal world-view, I would like just to make this comment, that I feel that the draft final report focuses too much on white fella legal frameworks. I want to commend you for pointing out that there are effects on Aboriginal people who are not traditional owners and who are not native title-holders. And I feel your report should emphasise that more, and



protect those people more. That's the first thing I'd like to say about that because to harm the land and waters, for traditional Aboriginal people, is to harm family. And as you've been told, to harm the land and waters damages the song-lines. So you have a beautiful picture on the cover of your report and I've tried to emphasise that any of our Western-type mining activities actually spears family. So I've defaced the picture with great respect. So as I've said, I commend you for your recommendations 11.3 and 11.8, and I hope you'll be able, in the final final report, to give a very strong emphasis to those. So that's the things that I want to say as a white fella about my understanding of Aboriginal world-view.

The second point, the baseline studies, I commend you for your recommendation and your acknowledgement that there isn't enough information at the moment. And that needs to be collected, but it needs to be done first. So that's simply what I want to emphasise on that.

And then the third point, and I guess this is my main point in my short time of living in the territory. My wife and I came at the beginning of 2015. We spent six months up in Humpty Doo, and then since September 2015, we've lived in Tennant Creek. We love it here, we're very grateful for the Waramungu people for welcoming us, and allowing us to live here. But I'm amazed, having lived in big city for a long, long time, I'm amazed at the lack of capacity to regulate things in the territory and even to support infrastructure. The two, of course, are connected.

So from the time we arrived, September 2015 to November 2017 when the Tennant Creek power station was upgraded, there seemed to be almost monthly power failures in Tennant Creek. So that was all going to be fixed. The power station was upgraded. I forget how old, maybe more than 20 years old the old infrastructure was. But the very week, less than a week after the power station got upgraded, there was a big power failure. Now that's the Tennant and District Times, and I've just emphasised, there's a note down the bottom. The 90-minute power outage on Sunday was caused by a transformer failure and was unrelated to the new equipment at the power station. But it still failed.

And then following that failure, the computers at the primary school were out for a few days, somehow related to that power failure. And in the courthouse, the communication systems were out for several days, and that created great chaos. I spend a lot of time at the courthouse, and other infrastructure failures regularly happen there. And that is a great detriment to justice for all people, but most people in court are indigenous people. So I have a very poor view of the capacity of the territory to regulate and keep things going. Your recommendation is to set up a completed independent body, but people in the territory just seem to think set things the way they are, I think basically outsiders to the territory. Without outside help, I don't think things will be effective.

So another little illustration of that. I've said I help at the Indigenous church. They have a bus, was first registered in 2008. But evidently, was registered in an incorrect vehicle registration category because they got a letter in



2017 to tell them that they needed to take it to Alice Springs for it to be re-inspected. And I think that letter only came because after the sale of the TIO, Territory Insurance Office, they then decided that they would outsource things. We had to go to a broker. The broker got quotes from outside the territory, and I think the new insurer discovered that the bus had, all that time, been registered incorrectly. And I suspect because we got a refund, the church had been over-charged for all those years. So I just want to make the point, that you have acknowledged in your report, that failures big and small are regularly occurring, and big ones are reported in the media. And I note that in your draft report, widespread concerns like I'm making to you are referred to. And I just want to emphasise that it's the truth.

So I just want to conclude by saying I admire and commend the hard work of the panel. You've been running around all over the place, and I commend you, and your report is very well presented. But I can only conclude that the assessment in the publicity for the report that reads, "If the recommendations made in this draft report are adopted and implemented in full, those risks may be mitigated or reduced, and in many cases eliminated all together to acceptable levels, having regard to the totality of the evidence." With all respect, I think that that conclusion will remain a pipe drain.

Hon. Justice Pepper: Thank you very much Mr Dixon for your succinct but punchy submission. It's appreciated. I don't have any questions, I do have just one comment that is ... I just wanted to point out that Dr David Ritchie lives in the territory, Dr Alan Anderson lives in the territory, and Dr David Jones has spent 16 years in the territory.

Peter Dixon: Sorry.

Hon. Justice Pepper: That's alright. Any questions? Yes, Dr Smith.

Dr. Ross Smith: Thank you very much for that presentation. As you alluded, we've heard similar concerns about the capacity to regulate in the past, in other hearings and in community forums. And you also noted that we've made some recommendations for how to improve the capacity to regulate within Northern Territory. Given your mixed background of working in Sydney and in Northern Territory, have you got some suggestions for us on how that could be further improved, having read our recommendations?

Peter Dixon: All I can say is that you must emphasise to the government there needs to be a new mindset. I think too often, people in the territory just accept things the way they are. And people get away with a lot of things because of that. There needs to be a new mindset, and if fracking is to go ahead, there has to be a whole new approach. Not just an independent body, but a whole new mentality.

Dr. Ross Smith: Yeah, I noted your comment about the acceptance in Northern Territory. And I wondered at the time, were you referring to acceptance within the various branches of government, particular regions, or were you talking about the people?



- Peter Dixon: Yeah partly. I guess it's survival in a sense. You got to learn to live with things going wrong.
- Dr. Ross Smith: Okay thank you.
- Hon. Justice Pepper: Yes, Dr Jones.
- Dr. David Jones: Mr Dixon, I note your comment about baseline studies, and you think, in your opinion, they should be done before anything happens. That's an issue which we're grappling with in the panel because obviously, there are different components of baseline and they, in terms of time and duration, they mean different things. Do you have any personal feelings about what might be the most important to get done first?
- Peter Dixon: I think you've referred to the groundwater studies. I think they're absolutely vital.
- Dr. David Jones: Yes, water seems to be one of the primary issues. At least technical issues that people are concerned with, but probably spiritual as well in terms of the land.
- Peter Dixon: Absolutely, yes.
- Hon. Justice Pepper: Anyone else? Yes, Dr Ritchie.
- Dr. David Ritchie: I think I was interested you were at the Humpty Doo for six months. You were coming across the Kenyon family and there was other times, many time with the Reverend Pattemore was a pretty substantial force in that community. Given that you've got sort of a unique position. You're coming in from outside, so everything's kind of ... you're learning and so you're really aware of change in the ... if there is change in the group, you're constituency. You've put to us that the idea of any mining is basically an assault on the individual, seen as if it's an allegorical statement. If you drill over the country, you drill on my bones, which we've heard and what you've heard. It's more than just an allegory. It is in fact it's stilt as a personal hurt. If you would like to sort of comment on that, and I have a follow-up question.
- Peter Dixon: Well all I want to say as a white fella, that I think we need to take notice more of that understanding.
- Dr. David Ritchie: I guess the follow-up question is that this whole area is being mined for generations in various times. That comment is sort of a total comment about all mining, and not just this industry. Have you noticed that there is a particular view about fracking as distinct from hard-rock mining, in which people have been familiar with obviously here for generations?
- Peter Dixon: I haven't noticed that in a spiritual sense. I think you've heard people's worries about pollution and things like that. But I haven't heard it in a spiritual sense, no.



Dr. David Ritchie: Okay, thank you.

Hon. Justice Pepper: Thank you very much Mr Dixon, thank you.

Peter Dixon: Thank you, thank you very much.

Hon. Justice Pepper: I think we have our next presenter.