

The Commissioner

NT Hydraulic Fracturing Inquiry

By email: hydraulicfracturing.inquiry@nt.gov.au

Dear Commissioner,

Friends of the Earth Australia (FoEA) welcomes the opportunity to provide some comments to this inquiry. We are a membership-based environmental organisation that has been active in Australia for 40 years.

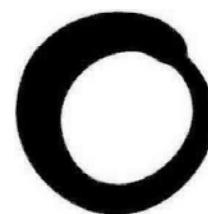
We join with Territorian environment groups including the Arid Lands Environment Centre and Environment Centre NT to call on the Inquiry to recommend the banning of Hydraulic Fracturing in the Northern Territory.

FoE Australia would like to draw the attention of the Hydraulic Fracturing Inquiry to the following:

The precautionary principle (Cole, 2005) must be used when considering a process that has the possibility to effect the water that communities are dependent on. Hydraulic fracturing ('fracking') is acknowledged as a process that injects a cocktail of chemicals into the seam of coal or rock holding gas in the process of releasing the gas. A considerable portion of these chemicals are not recovered in the drilling process, and there is a significant chance of contamination of aquifers. If contamination occurs, removal from the environment is most unlikely to be possible. There is already a number of contamination incidents that have occurred in Australia. These are outlined in the document "*Contaminated sites and accidents related specifically to CSG /LNG in Australia*" (Coal Seam Gas News, 2013).

For the Northern Territory, where agriculture is a major contributor to the economy, the threat of potential contamination should set off alarm bells. Fracking requires large volumes of water and retrieved water becomes salty, unusable 'produce water'. The potential salinisation of large areas of the Northern Territory is a threat to farmland, pastoral lands, cultural sites, and National Parks and potentially waterways. Each of these resources have a long term, inter generational ability to contribute sustainably to the economy of the Northern Territory. There is a real risk that a short term onshore gas boom could lead to long term negative environmental and economic impacts. To quote the Natural Heritage Trust "*Dryland salinity is extremely difficult to slow, halt or reverse. Wise management now will prove more cost-effective than attempts to solve dryland salinity after it has begun.*" (National Heritage Trust, 2001)

Experience with the unconventional gas industry in the Eastern states shows the damage that the unconventional gas industry has already inflicted on



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prime agricultural land. Impacts include land clearing, which fragments landscapes for roads, exploration and pipes and also makes farming more difficult. If drilling operations are of low yield, the sheer volume of drill and processing sites, roads and pipelines

that would be required to make a project commercially viable could reduce farms in production areas into wasteland.

Seismic exploration and the potential for oil spills in the marine environment is another demonstration of the challenges that the industry cannot adequately address. While industry claims that drilling is safe, the growing track record of proven contamination incidents shows that this is not the case.

We also hold a range of other specific concerns about the development of an unconventional gas industry in the Territory:

It would be hard to invent a more destructive technology than fracking. It is inherently invasive. The process of fracking negatively impacts on land, water and the atmosphere. These are the three pillars of the biosphere that we depend on for our survival.

It is possible that sites with special cultural significance may be damaged.

The value of pastoral leases and farms may decrease, and potentially private land and housing may also be impacted.

The beauty and bounty of our land would be marred by ugly gas industrialisation. It is difficult to imagine that tourism will benefit from gas development. In contrast, most tourists are likely to avoid areas with industrialisation. Such development would undermine the natural attributes of the NT which are such a drawcard for tourists, in both the domestic and international markets.

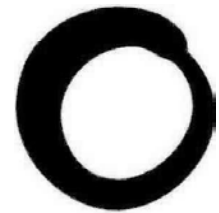
There would be significant carbon pollution from the operations, which would contribute to global warming, including fugitive methane emissions from leaking/ failed wells and cracked shale rocks.

There would be many more trucks on the road, with resulting impacts on other road users including tourists.

Gas is neither a renewable nor low emissions energy source, and development of substantial infrastructure would lock the Territory into the industry for decades to come.

Water and air pollution would pose a threat to landholders' health.

A large NT shale gas industry will prevent NT carbon pollution from falling for decades, and delay transition to large-scale renewable energy production.



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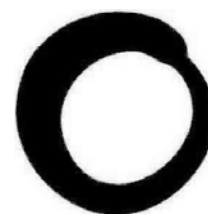
Summary

For these reasons we urge the Inquiry to ban any further development of the unconventional gas industry and the use of the process of fracking until it has been proven to be both safe for people and the environment and compatible with ongoing agricultural activity.

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