



Alice Springs – Heather McIntyre

Please be advised that this transcript was produced from a video recording. As such, the quality and accuracy of this transcript cannot be guaranteed and the Inquiry is not liable for any errors.

4 August 2017

Alice Springs Convention Centre, Alice Springs

Speakers: Heather McIntyre

Heather McIntyre: My name is Heather McIntyre, and I come as myself, as a concerned citizen, however I do actually contribute to the Central Australian Frack Free Alliance.

Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper: Thank you.

Heather McIntyre: Okay. So, basically I also come on the basis that I've been here in Elder Springs since 1974 and made my home here and raised a family here and had a number of incarnations as far as career goes. And part of that is about, I've travelled to all aspects of the territory from 1974 up until more recently. So, having some knowledge of its vastness and its beauty and its meaning to the tourism industry, I suppose.

So just to start off, I'd like to make a statement which is basically saying why I am here, and I'm here wanting a total ban on fracking and not an outcome of mitigating the risks of fracking while building the industry in the Northern Territory. So, that's my position, so I thought I'd just make that a little bit clear.

So, I'm only sort of somehow touching on an aspect of, or perspective. One perspective that I might have about the impact of fracking in the Territory and that is really my concern of the industrialization of the landscape of the territory. That's for many varied reasons, but certainly one of those is about the tourism industry in the northern territory, given that over the decades that I've been here, that has become probably paramount as a primary industry, whereas in days gone past when I first came here, it might've been the cattle industry, but now it's just one of the industries here.

So, I quote actually from, I suppose, the Central Australian Tourism strategic plan for 2017 and '18 that "the NT is the pilgrimage that everybody wants to make. It remains an outback destination famous for its authenticity, its rawness, remoteness, its iconic landscapes, and most importantly, our cultural heritage, which has been maintained by indigenous people for over 60,000 years." And hence you may have heard in the news recently that there's been 30,000 odd artefacts and paintings just discovered in Nhulunbuy. Hence we are talking about untouched landscapes here, not just the Stuart Highway.



I could talk about the impact of water. I could talk about the impact of the social life of Alcie Springs and the northern territory, having been here for 70 years. The reasons why I came, the reasons why I stayed, and the reasons why people continue to come and make their homes here, and that's its uniqueness to anywhere else in Australia. And I suppose we could all say that, even if we lived in Melbourne, Sydney, or Hobart. And most of us have all come from other places.

But in relation to the tourism industry, is that given its increased, the increased focus on tourism in the Territory, is that I'm wondering how we could also think about having a fracking industry. Actually, not thinking about it, perhaps even moving towards it as Jemena would like to think that they are.

And I say that because having been involved in the campaign for a couple of years now, that came about because I had just finished walking the Larapinta Trail, which is an iconic walk in the territory of 223 kilometres, and if you haven't walked it, I'd recommend you do if you want to see the soul of this country.

My sense is that I saw that fracking was starting to be talked about by a notice board at Stanley Chasm, so from that, I came here, very angrily into town thinking, "Nobody's going to do this to my country." So hence, I need to make it quite clear, I'm really angry, also about the proposed industry, this proposed industry. And I live on the old east side of town. I've lived there mostly since I've been here in 40 odd years. So, not that I'm any official representative of the old east side, but I certainly did take part in the lock the gate type of door knocking that we did to gather statistics on how people felt about the industry coming to the territory. So, I'm one of those 89% of people who do not want to have fracking in the Territory.

Also, we had a local representative at the time knock at my door, and this is during the NT campaign, who said, "Can I help you with any issues?" And I'm a person who's got about six or seven, or eight or nine, or ten, even yellow triangles on my front gate that talk about "Ban Fracking". So, it became clear that that was my issue, to Dale, and she did say that it wasn't just the old east side, and I quote that, is that she said, "It's not just the old east side that is concerned about this. We're finding the feedback from all parts of Alice Springs is that nobody wants to have fracking."

So, I suppose as I came to your inquiry when it was here earlier this year and centred around table discussion is that my aspect was how do you quantify, and I don't know how you gather the facts because I'm not a scientific person, about the social impact of the fracking industry on our way of life. And my sense is, even with Esther at the end of her presentation, which I thought was excellent, and I'm so pleased that she was able to give so many facts and figures and references, but is that I think from those questions at the end is that this is a very lively debate and it also reflects the anxiety that is amongst the community about fracking. I think I could hear that and see that in Esther's questions at the end of her presentation.



I myself, I had a business here in the '80s. We opened that business in 1981, the first of January. We had it for about almost 10 years. It was a service station business. I've drove down the south road now known as the Stuart Highway probably six to a dozen times before the road was made. I loved it. It was iconic. I loved it. My sense is that in the late '79 after self-government, we had a new railway line implemented from South Australia and we had a new south road. The idea of that was to open up the Territory to tourism in 1979, odd, and it certainly did. Our business grew as a result.

What we did graph over the period of time was okay, yes, it was the increase in business, and that was also through opening up the Territory, is the number of visitors that came by road, because what they wanted to see was the outback, and that is what the fracking industry is going to destroy. They will. They have grown up, as one woman said to me when we had what was called the Commercial Development Corporation, under the Paul Everingham government. They were set up to be able to develop the Territory for tourism.

So, they thought that when the Todd Mall was rebuilt and some of our iconic buildings knocked down, they thought that was a good idea. But hence, people came and said, "We were expecting to see the book that we read by Neville Shute, A Town Like Alice." Now, I'd like to think that we had progressed since then, of course, and we certainly as a resident would like to have things improved and be almost as progressive as everywhere else, but we don't want Queensland, we don't want Sydney, we don't want Melbourne. We actually want the Territory. That's our uniqueness that we sell.

Earlier this year, I attended a, what they call a Northern Territory tourism road show. That's put on by the tourism NT. It talks about and delivers a package about how they spent their budget last year, what were the statistics that they gained from that expenditure, where they reached, what they expect to happen. Then they take that all up the track, giving their members and local businesses an idea of what's going to happen in the next 12 months as well, because they also forecast what they're going to do in the next 12 months. I listened to that in astonishment, actually, as to how worldwide this place, the Northern Territory is being sold.

It does distress me too, also, the influx of people, but my sense is, I'd have to say gobsmacked at its outreach in promoting the Territory as an iconic place to visit. Its remoteness, its ancient landscape, its cultural heritage is what is being promoted. They actually sent out a request as to who would be interested in learning Mandarin next year because of the expected influx of wealthy Chinese tourists. They were overcome by applicants. Obviously it's an opportunity to be able to upgrade their skills, I suppose, but we're being sold to very wealthy Chinese people. We are being sold to very wealthy middle class Indian people as well.

Now, some of that feedback has been, "They're not coming here just to go from Darwin to Alice on an aeroplane or to Uluru. They want to do some



self-driving, be it guided self-driving. They want to see the vast areas that we have to offer. So, my sense is, I suppose, my quandary, is this is like to me living in parallel universes. On one hand, we have this iconic area of the Northern Territory being sold as this most amazing landscape of ancient lands and ancient culture, yet we are going to somehow desecrate the land with the fracking industry.

Now, I will quote you from some of the fact sheet that I offer, because in the last two or three years since I've become aware of fracking, I've actually manned a stall down at the Todd Markets every second week so that I can inform people of what fracking is. And I would only like to inform them on facts is my belief. So, one of those things, it says that "unconventional gas fields involves the industrialization of entire landscapers, covering considerably larger areas than conventional gas fields. They generally require thousands of wells, vast networks of roads and pipelines, compressor stations, processing plants, wastewater holding dens, and treatment plants." I also read this in your report last night as well that that's what it requires.

Now, I'm not sure that we can build a hundred metre barrier from the side of the road so that we can disguise them, because we don't have lots of gumtrees out there. So, we're an arid land. So, I suppose my passion comes from the fact that I've been here for so long. It may not be entirely factually based, but I leave that to other experts such as Esther and other people along the way. Rod Campbell, who can also give you the economic report on fracking, and a number of other people whose reports I have read.

But what I can offer is my passion for this place after 44 years, so much so that I appeared in actually the Central Australian Red Centre Adventurer's campaign last year or the year before, actually. So, I did actually go to Mark's camel farm, in fact I went twice, because I was then chosen for the tourism MT campaign to get people my age, so obviously late 50s, early 60s to come to the Territory in, I think what was the name of the campaign? "Just Do It", I think it was. "Just Do It."

So, had great fun, saw lots of the Territory that I hadn't seen for a few years. But what it does tell me is that there's an industry here that is going to employ far more people for a much longer period of time in tourism than it is in fracking. And fly-in, fly-out workers I can speak to some experience is that my oldest son was a fly-in, fly-out worker in western Australia. He has now come to his senses and has left the industry. The impact on relationship-

Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper:

Was that gas or mining?

Heather McIntyre:

It was gas. It was building, I think, a gas well over in Barrow Island, I think. Yeah. Yeah. He's a married man now who needs to buy a house, but the impact on his fly-in, fly-out life was what he decided that his relationships, his quality of life, his things that he likes to do are far more important. So, what I'm saying is, I suppose, I've heard that story and it may be anecdotal



evidence, but it's close to home. And he's a young man who told me when we were in Margaret River, because we drove through the great central highway that Mark's talks about when they were young children, three of them, I drove across the road down to Bunbury with my three kids.

So, what we admired was the landscape. What we admired was the remoteness. What we felt was the indigenous people of Australia still holding that space. They live on that space, they hold that space. I could only say that this industry would just be another form of colonisation, a distraction to what we've already done. And in fact, my term is that it's rape and pillage to our country. And I suppose from that, that's my passion speaking, but I suppose statistically is that I would like to say that again, contained in this document from Central Australia Tourism is that \$2.5 billion are gained annually through tourism in the Northern Territory. At the moment, or presently, it is upwards of 15,000 people that it employs. Now, that's a number that's going to continue to go up.

There's I don't know how many businesses in town, tourist businesses, but I'm sure somebody could tell you that, but my sense that's only going to increase with increased tourism. And that's not just in Alice Springs, it's not just in Darwin. The track in between will also be a big part of the pilgrimage, and the pilgrimage will go from here and then it'll go to western Australia, because people want the outback. People want the isolation. They want to know that this was known as the Lucky Country because of our pioneering. And it's not about fracking, no. It's about having respect for the land, and it's about having respect for our cultures, I quite believe.

So, another one is, can't say I'm very good at this, so sorry. What Central Australia Tourism has also applied to do just recently is to be recognised as one of the world's top 100 sustainable destinations. So, it seems incongruent to me, also, that they're going to have a fracking industry at the same place, or around the same place, but anyway, is that we would therefore become, if granted, we would become the first Australian destination to be granted this honour, and the outcome of that decision will be made on the 28th of September.

So, I quickly looked up what that meant, and many pages to be said, but it's about sustainable living and sustainable environments, I suppose, is the very tiny synopsis. But I do have a piece of paper here that will give you the website. So, really, I think that the only other thing that I would like to add to that as far as our ancient country is concerned, and our ancient landscapes, is basically, I suppose, our ancient water.

The water that we drink here, that we are very grateful to have and to drink, and I must admit every time I turn the tap on, I am thankful, has taken 180 million years to get here. That's how long it's taken to work itself through the rocks for us to have it. So, we don't have water restrictions here. Lots of people wonder why we don't, because we live in an arid country, but we don't. So then again, again, it's incongruent to think that a fracking industry is going to be able to conserve any sense or source of water that is going to



keep up with the 180 million years that it's going to take for us to turn the tap on and get it again. My sense is from my statistics that I've been quoted here from the mining industries themselves is that each frack uses 15 million litres of water. Each well can be fracked eight to ten times. It is expected that if the 83% of the Territory is therefore, which is now therefore under exploration licence, is fracked, we could have up to 60,000 wells. I don't know where our water's coming from.

I did actually spend two years in New Zealand, actually, just to have a little change and for schooling reasons. My kids ... about 10, 12 years ago. When I came back, there was a tour by the Power and Water company of our sewer ponds, because they have a lot of really great green waste management at the sewage ponds, which in turn attracts a lot of birds that migrate from all over the world, which then again attracts people who come to Alice Springs to see those birds.

But hence, one of the things the ... did say at the time was that reason our electricity bills went up annually was because just from domestic use in Elder Springs, our water table dropped a metre each year. Therefore, they would have to get our water from an extra metre down, and that was the cost. So, the cost in bold was about actually getting our water from that extra metre down each year. So, I'm still, perhaps I'm thick, but I don't understand how fracking is going to work with our limited water supply. I don't understand that. And the fact that you could put that under threat with the use of fracking and chemicals in that fracking process, as Esther has pointed out and I'm sure many other people have, to put that as risk, I think is diabolical.

So, I suppose I'd like to finish really now in saying that I do actually call upon the commission to very seriously consider, and I know this actually based on facts. I can't offer you the facts, because I'm not a scientist, and I know other people have done that, but I can give you the perspective of what I feel would be the impact to the fabric of the society in the Northern Territory if fracking was to go ahead. So, I just ask that you consider that very carefully. Thank you.

Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper:

Thank you very much, Miss McIntyre. Do we have any questions or comments from the panel? Yes. Dr. Andersen. Thank you.

Dr Alan Andersen:

Yes. Thanks, Miss McIntyre. The panel really appreciates your passion for the deserts and concerns about people who live here and the tourist industry. So, the question I have is how would you feel if fracking were restricted to somewhere else in the Territory where tourists don't go and where local communities were supportive of it?

Heather McIntyre:

Well, I don't know where tourists don't go, because there's certainly a lot of, I grew up with the Leyland Brothers and there's certainly plenty of people who really still come here for that off road experience. So, in saying that, I mean, you might be talking about Beetaloo basin up there, but I don't know in terms of tourism what that looks like. But certainly as any outback



experience, there are many, many, many people who still come for an off road experience, so I don't see that fracking anywhere would actually be desirable. And I would feel that I would be compromising.

I live in Central Australia, but I would like to think that I hold the space for the whole of the Territory in talking about fracking, actually. So, I wouldn't be prepared to compromise on that. And my sense is that in being on my stool, or the ... stool, not my stool, although I feel like I have some ownership of it, is that people from all around Australia come here. And a lot of those are older people, and they feel very powerless because some of those peoples were they live, their states are fracking and they feel very powerless about it.

So, what the message to us is about keep up the good fight, don't have it. Victoria has a moratorium now. Great. Tasmania has a moratorium. Great. We can only hope that this, our moratorium, stands forever. But my sense around that is, how do I feel about that, is that there's lots of people that come here with their kids, also for that outback experience, because it's the iconic outback. So, I have two young, gorgeous teenagers who came from Castlemaine, and they had actually recently demonstrated around the, a religious event that was happening down there, about the mosque being built. And he was for migration.

So, you ask me what has to do with today, I showed him a picture of what our landscape would look like if fracking was to happen, and this is a picture of Queensland and the Colosseum gas. This is what it looks like, the landscape, and his reaction, which I'll never forget, was "My god. That's scars upon the landscape. That's scars upon our earth." He immediately bought an anti-fracking yellow t-shirt and said, "Tell me what to do." So, I'm just saying also that that view of our outback is held perhaps within those younger people today, and our cultural heritage as Australians, I suppose, is part of that outback.

So if communities are given the full picture of information, rather than perhaps a little being blindsided, if it's about just economic development, and they don't know what the consequences are of possible land movement, possible water contamination, possible thousand deliveries of trucks or whatever. If they're given all that information and they still continue to move forward, I don't have control over that because that's there land. But my sense is I would be very surprised in some respects that given all of the information that those decisions would go forward. That's what I think.

Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper:

Thank you. Yes, Dr. Beck.

Dr Vaughan Beck AM:

Yes, once again, thank you for your passionate articulation of the iconic nature of the Northern Territory. Just, you've been very concerned, and perhaps rightly so about the potential impact of tourism. So, the impact of the gas industry on tourism. But just firstly to acknowledge that around Alice Springs within the Amadeus Basin, there is already an oil and gas industry of



some 100 wells, at least 90 wells, some of which have been hydraulically fractured, and the tourism industry seems to be able to co-exist with that level of activity. And appreciating that a shale gas operation could be an order of magnitude greater than what the current activities within the Amadeus Basin.

But given that there is already an example within the Northern Territory of what appears to be co-existence, then do you preclude the possibility of there being another development somewhere else away from Alice Springs where there could still be a continuation of that co-existence between the two industries?

Heather McIntyre:

For myself, no. For myself, I would, if we had 90, or those wells that exist now as there has been a that's conventional fracking is that they have been, they're here. I suppose to me, that would be the moratorium. They remain, if that's what happens. But no, as far as going forward as a development elsewhere, no. I don't. I think that at the moment, that impacts on traditional owners. It impacts of pastoralists, as well. So, my sense around that is that for an industry to come in and step over those people whose land it has been for 60,000 years, no. I think that actually discounts those people. So, I stand with them, with those people in maintaining their rights, as we did with Wataka.

I think Wataka was mentioned earlier today, but my sense around, I think it was last year, where the elders sought our help from the Central Australian Frack Free Alliance to be able to actually stop licences. There were two licence that were going to be granted over Wataka itself, over King's Canyon. What they had to say was disregarded by the Giles government and so they sought our help. So, the EDO, the environmental development officer, went to Canberra with them and the minister at the time granted the fact that King's Canyon would not be touched.

So, my sense is that this is, I suppose, as highlighted in your report, it fractures communities, those who are for and those who are against. So, all I can do is stand with those people who are against fracking. So, I would not contemplate it. I've left before because I said I would because of the particular government that was voted in. When they were voted out, I came back. I would do that again.

My daughter at the moment is working for Track Larapinta during, she just finished Uni, and she takes out people who fly in from all over Australia and other countries, and she treks the land with them. She shows them the untouched land. She has the history of the land. There are traditional owners that go out there and speak to these people. So, what you're sending back to Canada and what you're sending back to America and England, and other places that these people come from is Australia and its soul to me, and this is known as the heart of Australia. So, I must admit, I wouldn't compromise. No. I would not.

Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper:

Thank you. So, you mentioned conventional fracking. What do you mean by



conventional fracking?

Heather McIntyre: There's two different types of fracking, and there's the unconventional type, which is the shale gas fracking, and there's the conventional fracking. So, the conventional fracking is reflected in the fact that you have a, this is my description, is that through the information that I sort of summarised, is that you'll have a large pool of gas in rock where it's easily attainable. It's like having a lake, I describe it as. And so you will have therefore a well that goes directly into that gas and that gas often comes up because of the water table underneath it might pressurise that. So, you don't need toxic chemicals and you don't need to have three or four caves of horizontal pipelines and ... vertical and then horizontal.

So, basically, that's how, that's the difference between conventional. I could give you a pamphlet on it and can show you, but it is highlighted in your report, about the differences.

Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper: There's conventional gas and unconventional gas.

Heather McIntyre: Yes, it's methodology.

Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper: Yes. But I guess I'm just trying to understand where you draw the difference. Fracking is fracking.

Heather McIntyre: I suppose there is what's called, we've got shale fracking. Shale fracking, which is what this inquiry is about, how to retrieve the gas that's caught up in the small pockets amongst that geological layer of shale rock, yeah? That's what we're talking. So, you've got to fracture that rock, that layer, yes? Whereas ... I would call conventional gas fracking is that you go directly down to the source, basically, without that fracturing methodology.

Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper: So, would it surprise you to find that there are 34 wells in relative close proximity, although that's a, I'd say a relative term in itself given the distances and the vast size of the Territory, near Alice Springs that have been fracked?

Heather McIntyre: Yes.

Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper: Okay.

Heather McIntyre: That doesn't, no, sorry. If you're talking about Mereenie I'm aware of that. Yeah. I am aware of that. Conventional gas fracking, yes.

Speaker 1: Perhaps it's just appropriate to note that in your distinguished conventional and unconventional wells, normally conventional wells do not need to be fracked.

Heather McIntyre: Yes.



- Speaker 1: But they are examples of formations which can either be in shale or what's called type gas.
- Heather McIntyre: Yes.
- Speaker 1: Which do need to be fracked. So, it's not fracturing for conventional wells, it's fracturing in other geological formations, which are characterised as either shale, which this particular inquiry's concerned, but they can be fracturing in type formations, which have somewhat similar characteristics to shale and they're closer to shale than they are to conventional wells.
- Heather McIntyre: Yes.
- Speaker 1: It is hydraulically fracturing.
- Heather McIntyre: Yes.
- Speaker 1: But I think the important thing for me also to note that those fracturing operations, I think, are primarily attached to vertical wells rather than horizontally deviated wells where there are long laterals. There are differences, but you just do need to acknowledge the difference between conventional wells which don't normally require fracturing and fracturing in either shale or type formations.
- Heather McIntyre: Yes. Yes. And I am aware of those differences. I may not have articulated that very well, but I am aware of those differences.
- Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper: Just wanted to be clear.
- Heather McIntyre: Yes. I am aware of those differences. Yes.
- Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper: All right. 'Cause there are wells in and around Alice Springs. That have been fracked.
- Heather McIntyre: Okay.
- Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper: With chemicals.
- Heather McIntyre: Yeah. Yes. Well, we've got exploration licences around, so that's not surprising. And I can't keep up with how fast the industry moves, but yes, thank you for that, pointing that out.
- Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper: No, that's all right. I suppose it's my confusion more than anything else. All right. Anything else from the panel at all? Or anything else you wish to say?
- Heather McIntyre: No.



Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper:

Thank you very much for coming today, for taking the time and the considerable effort in making your presentation. Now, I saw that you were reading from a document, and did you have a prepared written document that you're reading out from, or?

Heather McIntyre:

Look, I just have, I just in my own inimitable way, I just make dot points here and there, so I did use some documents to get some of those facts from, yes.

Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper:

Well, if you were amenable, we would certainly like to be provided with those documents. They will be then, as I said, received as a submission and put on our website. So, if you do wish to provide them to the panel in that way, to the inquiry in that way, just give them to one of the members of the task force, who's at the table that is behind you.

Speaker 2:

And a copy of your brochure there would be quite interesting to have, too.

Heather McIntyre:

This one? Okay. Look. I don't have all those brochures here. I've got this one, but will I send them to you?

Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper:

No, just give them right there to the lady.

Heather McIntyre:

But I don't have them all here is what I mean.

Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper:

Yes, no.

Heather McIntyre:

I've come straight from work. Yeah. So, can I send them to you or drop them off?

Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper:

Absolutely. You can send them to us electronically, that's fine. Or in the mail.

Heather McIntyre:

Okay.

Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper:

Whatever's gonna be most convenient to you and the task force will be able to give you the details.

Heather McIntyre:

Okay. Or I'll go back to work and get them. Yeah. Okay. All right.

Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper:

I think we'll be leaving here at about, I think we're gonna be closing up. My understanding is that, I think we have our next presenter here, is that right? We do. He's flown some considerable distance to get here. So, we'll hear from him and then that will be the end of today.



Heather McIntyre: Okay.

Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper: So, if you just contact one of the task force members just behind you and they can provide you with details as to where to send information.

Heather McIntyre: Okay. Great. All right. Thank you.

Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper: Thank you very much, Miss McIntyre.

Heather McIntyre: Thank you.