

Petrena Ariston - Top Didj

## Environmental impact and risk to the environment and other industries such as tourism

I am concerned about tourism and the environment in general when it comes to the impact of the unconventional oil and gas industry. The NT has vast areas of important savanna and grassland that our government has signed over to be fracked by an invasive industry with extensive water use, who are experimenting with technology, drilling through our aquifers and groundwater basins, are excluded from the NT Water Act and still unsure of what to do with the tens of millions litres of toxic produce water that each well will great.

Tourism is a large economic driver of the Northern Territory economy. It has a broad impact upon many other industry sectors and generates a significant number of jobs in the Territory. We have a strong, vibrant and multi-faceted economy and a long established reputation as a unique tourism destination centred round our extraordinary natural landscapes and rich aboriginal culture. According to the Tourism NT Corporate website the combined international and domestic visitor results for the year ending June 2016, increases were experienced across the Top End (up 24% to 513,000 holiday visitors) and Central Australia (up 9.2% to 432,000 holiday visitors). The goal of *TourismNT Vision 2020* is to grow the visitor economy to \$2.2 billion by 2020 as measured by overnight expenditure. The NT is on track if recent growth continues. The "Australian" tourism industry employs nearly a million people, with 929 000 people employed directly and indirectly. This accounts for eight per cent of Australia's total employment. (Tourism Australia Website) Shale fracking on the other hand is an unknown industry that still has many unanswered questions surrounding it. But one thing we do know, the gas industry pays less tax than other Aussie companies. 85% of the companies exporting gas are foreign owned, so the bulk of the profits go offshore as well. Only 2% of Australian workers are employed by the whole mining industry. ([Mining in Australia - Wikipedia](#))

Fracking in the NT potentially would follow the boom-bust cycles and we can see what that has done to towns in the NT over the years. It could be argued that tourism is a far more sustainable industry than resource extraction, especially of a finite resource using hydraulic fracturing. I feel there is a risk that fracking would undermine the tourism industry substantially and it would take a very long time to recover and restore its visitor base, image and brand. An extensive line of oil fracking wells dotted throughout the outback could undermine the tourism brand that the TourismNT and tours companies market nationally and internationally. This would be particularly true for visitors who come from regions where fracking has been banned, suspended, or has generated controversy and public criticism in some way. I know when I talk to tourists, who come into my business from overseas and Australia, particularly Queensland and NSW say to me, "don't let it happen". I think as a tourist, the very presence of well-drilling sites and flares burning gas, will not only disfigure the beauty of the NT and its small communities, but will definitely discourage them to come back or recommend us as a destination.

When I have gone to public consultations or read one of their glossy brochures it all sounds so simply. At first, the few well pads, roads and pipelines from shale development seem like tiny holes and cuts, and the canvas still holds. But if you look at a heavily developed landscape down the road, you see rural communities turned into industrial zones and the loss of natural habitats. Our savannah landscapes known to be the most pristine in the world would become islands fragmented by a dense web of roads, pipelines and well pads. They never tell the whole story. What will the NT end up looking like? Not a place that tourists will want to come to. Might not be in our time but I

don't want our region to look like that in the future and I have grand children living in the NT. What sort of legacy would I be leaving to them if I just stood back and let this happen? Once they get in it's done. No turning back. In my area only Katherine town is actually protected, and we are told national parks, but they can still drill next to them!! Also what about the ecological implications for wide-ranging sensitive species? Who cares about them? And that's not even considering the more extensively studied direct impacts of fracking-potential ground water contamination, root degradation and soil erosion.

The repetition and constant promise of "jobs and royalties" has never been backed up or the duration of them, but with tourism we can see the long term jobs and benefits. Given the experience of the gas fields in Queensland and the USA, a responsible government should be in a position to carry out a cost/benefit analysis for the introduction of a gas industry which accounts for the negative impacts on communities, the environment and other industries as well as the cost to the government in infrastructure, including ongoing maintenance. We are all aware and concerned about the legacy of environmental disasters associated with the mining industry which demonstrates the failure of the regulatory arrangements of the NTG to prevent such events and the eventual assumption by the government of the costs of the clean-up. We now have contaminated water in the Katherine region from chemicals used in firefighting foams for training at the RAAF base between 1988 and 2004. So deep shale gas extraction, which will see more chemicals possibly entering our water system is a big issue in this town. There are communities all over the world reeling from the toxic effects of fracking. It is mind boggling what has happened in America and what is taking place now in Queensland. Fracking is not just ugly and intrusive it's destructive and toxic. All gas wells fail and leak eventually which means they will pollute our waterways and the air we breathe. If they contaminate our aquifers what can be done to fix them. Nothing. I love the Territory and its life style and will do my utmost to protect it. Thank you.

Petrena Ariston

Top Didj Cultural Experience & Art Gallery

████████████████████

████████████████████

████████████████████