



Alice Springs – Amber McBride

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Alice Springs Convention Centre, Alice Springs

Speakers: Amber McBride

Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper: Please state your name, and if you're appearing on behalf of an organisation, please state the organisation that you're appearing on behalf of, but if you're appearing for yourself, just state your name.

Amber McBride: My legal name is Amber McBride and identify as ecofeminist warrior mermaid fairy princess cowgirl, and my chosen name is Fanny Waterfalls.

Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper: Thank you.

Amber McBride: I'm very nervous. Thank you very much for this opportunity and for having me here today. I'd like to just acknowledge the traditional owners of this country that we meet on today and pay my respects to elders past, present, and future, and just convey my sincere hope for a swift and just reconciliation process.

I guess a little bit about me. I'm not so familiar with these types of settings. My parents travelled to Australia and my maternal ... My grandparents: they landed in country Victoria, in a little place called Rainbow, and my mom and dad met at art school in New South Wales, and they fell in love in the Nimbin Aquarius Festival, and I was conceived in a tent on a mountain in New Zealand and they raised their three children in the Barrington Tops in a self-sufficient art farm, and all their children are named colours, so hence, Amber. My grandmother's name was Fanny, which is where I got that from.

Growing up was an idyllic fairy princess childhood, which I'm learning more often these days is quite rare. My parents are both artists and musicians and I also am an artist and musician, so living on the country, my connection to country is very strong and always has been. Growing my food, harvesting food, building the fire to make the hot water system work, and enduring floods, bush fires, snow, drought. Some of my childhood memories include my mother being so passionate about unlawful tree felling, so we had followed trucks and tracks and photograph temporary saw mills and send letters and maps and so on.

Activism has also been a very strong part of my upbringing, so as a young adult, I studied art and in that university environment, developed a very



strong sense for social justice. I later retrained in community services and welfare, and I've been working in that industry for over 15 years. Mainly in the areas of health promotion, community education and training. Largely, my experience has been working with people of diverse sexuality and gender in areas of mental health, alcohol and other drugs, sexual health and discrimination, people living with HIV or hepatitis and other compromised immune systems.

Also being part of the Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transgender Intersex Queer and Questioning Community has taught me strength through adversity, pride in diversity, and how to self care. That sense of community pride is what brought me to Alice Springs, so in 2013 was the very first pride festival in Alice Springs, and I had ventured here, where I met some beautiful local sister girls, from this country, who shared with me the dreaming of the caterpillar story. I think that's where I first learned about the fragility of the desert and this particular country here.

It was during that time, that I fell in love with the river. I went to the river, even though some local shop keepers in the city or CBD had advised me never to walk across the river, and I was thinking, "Oh, I've already been walking across the river." I didn't have a problem with walking across the river, in fact, I would go and sit in the river, and I have loved it. When I say that I love the river, I'll go back a couple of years, so part of my journey as a performance artist lead me to Spain, where I participated in the ecosexuality workshops, run by Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stevens. They're American artists, and I discovered ecosexuality. So being quite open and diverse myself, it rang true and I couldn't. It was like all the fireworks went off in my brain and it was so right for me.

I came out as an ecosexual and married the Earth, so when I talk about sitting in the river and loving the river, it's like a romantic relationship, is the way to describe it. I took the Earth on as a lover, and I treat the Earth as I would a lover. I'm not sure that the panelists here have heard many testimonials or maybe even heard the term of ecosexuality, but that's me, and that's who I am, which really is why I'm here today. Because the fracking, the hydraulic fracturing of the Earth truly upsets my whole being. I know I'm not alone.

I also, in Spain, attended the first ever level two ecosex workshop. I've continued to develop my performance art, in regards to ecosexuality and sharing the sort of risque with the ecoactivism. Together, it just is a new way, I guess, of also just as an art form, helping some people or to facilitate for some people a new way of thinking, increased consciousness around the planet, and how we see the planet and treating the planet as a lover and just to think about that might help someone decide to recycle or not. Who knows?

It worries me. The hydraulic fracturing, in particular with the sacred sites and the draining stories. I worry about the consultation that may or not have been happening. Proper consultation. Meaningful consultation with



teams of experts in many different areas and translators being available. I worry that this has not happened properly, and I think I don't really have much power or influence, and I don't really have much that I can do to protect the sacred sites. My empathy just tells me, very strongly, how difficult and heart breaking this is, protecting sacred sites. It breaks my heart to see it happening, where protection is just not there. If the Earth is a living being, and we're here to protect life, where is the Earth's protectors? People like me, I guess, just doing what we can. My heart really goes out to traditional owners and custodians, who continue to contest and battle to protect.

Right before arriving in Alice Springs, I was literally living on the front line in Bentley in New South Wales, just outside of Lismore, so I'd packed up everything: my whole life, and was living in a tent, on the front line, protecting country, and that's my form of activism. I'm nonviolent, direct action type of person, in that sitting on the country, literally, I get immediate confirmations I'm in the right place. I'm doing the right thing. This feels right, I'm meant to be here, and the people that I meet, the stories that we share, the birds I see, it all connects, and it feels so right. The fracking feels so wrong, and that I'm very strong, to be sitting there amongst fellow ecoactivists.

When I'm in the Northern Territory, it is very, very difficult. I have to go onto the website and make the submission. I get the confirmation formal ways. It's going to be at the convention centre, and who are you representing, and I'm trying my hardest to play along with these particular ways, but it is not really what I'm used to or my preferred method of protecting country, but I'm giving it a go today.

I like to think global, act local. It's an old saying, and I think in regards to global thinking, I hope and expect that this inquiry is looking at the whole planet, in regards to fracking. Chemicals unknown, being stabbed into the Earth. It's happening elsewhere. I'm sure you've got all these informations about the water catching on fire in America and all these stories, where fracking is happening and that there is evidence of extreme health issues, associated with the fracking process and the outcomes from fracking, where in places like Bolivia, passing law in 2010 for the rights of Mother Earth.

It's interesting. There's a conversation happening amongst ecosexuals about Earth Mother and Earth Lover, and you look at the way we treat the mother. I guess it also calls to my inner feminist, coming out. It's interesting to be presenting to seven neck ties. I guess that is also increasing my feeling of uncomfortability in that that's not necessarily recognised as a safe place for me, but they do, across the planet, pass these incredible laws, but really, they are, I guess, from where we sit today, incredible that it's guaranteeing regeneration in that particular law for the rights of Mother Earth is protection of water from contamination, so it's quite interesting that there are places on the planet, already making these amazing healing gestures and safeguarding and protecting the planet.



Where there's the polar opposite happening with exemptions from disclosing chemicals being used during hydraulic fracturing, and with the possibility that the central desert water source will be irreparably harmed, seems only held off by a moratorium. I am outraged. This threat, alone, is a significant mental health issue. I'm talking about the anxiety and depression this threat alone is costing me. The outcome will cost the planet. The fragility of the desert landscape and the diversity I recognise. If indeed the planet is a living being, which I believe the planet is alive, I wonder for the retaliation and consequences. What the planet's idea of natural justice might be for fracturing. It's a little bit Tripitaka, perhaps. Little bit ...

I'm talking about energetic things, as well, as psychic things. It could be something to consider, in terms of warning about stabbing the planet and injecting it with these unknown substances into unknown places. What shakeup dangerous materials is absolute madness, and I struggle to fathom it, and I cry for the planet, so ...

I guess there's only one other thing is that in the creation story and as you believe how the planet came to be, different stories tell different ways, and there is one story that says of a rainbow serpent flying in the sky and coming underground and creating waterways. You might be familiar with this story, but the fact is there are tunnels under there, under the Earth, inside the planet. There is caves. There is unknown territories, and I believe that there are beings in those caves and we don't know it. They're deep underground in hiding or have something else going on. The notion of any fracking, for me, is a threat to life and a life that I would wish to protect. Thank you.

Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper:

Thank you very much, Ms. Waterfall, and certainly appreciate you coming here today, giving up your time, giving up your energy. The panel's very grateful for your first hand account of how the thought of fracking might affect you, so thank you very much for coming here. I just wanted to say just one thing. Perhaps my way of reassurance, I'm not sure, but to the extent that we are going out and consulting with aboriginal communities in remote locations, we are using translators from the aboriginal interpretive service to the extent that we can. We are translating our materials into language and we are putting out plain English versions of our language as well, and we are certainly seeking the advice on the ground, when we get there is the most culturally appropriate way of doing consultation, so we are challenging, to be sure.

Amber McBride: It's complex.

Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper: Nevertheless, absolutely, but nevertheless, we are endeavouring to do the right thing.

Amber McBride: Thank you.

Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper: Any questions? Yes, Dr. Ritchie.



Dr David Ritchie: Thank you. I would just like to say, that was one of the best presentations we've had, so thank you, because it really does, from a personal perspective, really does, I think, encapsulate a lot of the feelings that have been presented to us in perhaps a less concise way, but that definitely ... That emotional response. The second thing is, it is intimidating to sit in front of a whole lot of old men in suits, but I can sure assure you ...

Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper: Just hang on, hang on. I've been to Annie Sprinkle's performance.

Dr David Ritchie: I think we should say, on behalf of the other guys with ties, we only wear them occasionally, and it is there as a sign of respect to you, sothat's why we're wearing them.

Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper: It is. Absolutely.

Dr David Ritchie: Yeah.

Thank you.

Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper: Yes. Dr. Andersen.

Dr Alan Andersen: Yeah, thanks Ms. Waterfall, and I just wanted to start off by saying I know Rainbow well. Very familiar with Rainbow, even know Yapeet and Mali is one of my favourite parts of the world. Yeah, this tie doesn't see much action, I can assure you. I just wanted to ask about ... You talked about how you found the fracking itself really offensive, and I'm just wondering how ... 'Cause it's more than just fracking. You know there's drilling. To what extent is it that are other processes? Not just the fracking, but drilling, mining in general, I guess. How do you feel about that?

Amber McBride: I think I'd used the word stabbing a couple of times, which sums it up. It's violent act for me. All that drilling, penetrating. There's so many different ways I could describe it. When there's just so much unknown, it worries me. Does that answer that?

Dr Alan Andersen: Oh, I think so, and I think what you're say is more than just the fracking. The actual fracking itself.

Amber McBride: Well, everything. Everything. The way that the laws are set out, so that the ... What do you call it? The tentative small drillings, checking things, testing things. It's all ... Everywhere is sacred country. It's not okay to just go and stab around the planet, where you like to see what you might find. That's how I'm feeling about that.

Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper: Professor Hart.

Professor

Barry Hart AM: So you made it very clear you're a lover of the Earth, and thank you for that. Obviously, because of this inquiry, you focused on hydraulic fracturing. Is that your same feeling about all mining?



Amber McBride: Yeah. Yeah. Although, my exposure has been mostly in regards to hydraulic fracturing for the shale seam gases. From my experience in Bentley, I think, in Lismore, which is where a lot of my knowledge was heightened, whereas my knowledge in other areas is not so heightened. However, once the waterways are contaminated, that's it. There's no coming back, whereas in Spain, where I'd participated in a wedding ceremony to coal, where a whole team of Spanish artists and myself and Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stevens performed at a festival, where we all married coal. I can see in Spain some places, which were coal mines that is now regenerating.

I have faith and hope that some mistakes we do make. We make mistakes. We learn from our mistakes, and we regenerate, and we say sorry to the planet and smother her with love, because the fracking the chemicals is unknown. The types of outcomes that we're seeing is no birds, poisoned waters. There's no coming back from that, so I think that has what has steered me to being quite passionate about this particular course, although there's plenty of problems on the planet, and people is generally the biggest problem on the planet.

Professor
Barry Hart AM: Thank you.

Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper: Any further questions? Comments? Ms. Waterfall, thank you very much for coming here today. We appreciate the time and sacrifice and effort you've made. Thank you.

Amber McBride: Thank you.

Hon. Justice
Rachel Pepper: That draws to a conclusion the first day of the public hearings in Alice Springs, and we will resume tomorrow morning. Thank you very much.