



## ***Arid Lands Environment Centre – Hearing Transcript***

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**6 March 2017**

***Alice Springs Convention Centre, Alice Springs***

***Speakers: Jimmy Cocking, Alex Read***

Jimmy Cocking: Just to give you a bit of a background, the Arid Lands Environment Centre is the peak regional environmental organisation servicing central Australia. It's a community-based organisation, and we've been developing and delivering environmental sustainability programmes in central Australia since 1980. For more than 35 years we've advocated for the conservation and responsible management of land, water, natural resources in the arid lands. We've also been involved in this issue since we first heard about it. We've been campaigning for a moratorium since 2011. Our policy previously, outlined in the most recent Hawk inquiry, we were advocating for a moratorium until we had a strict enough regulatory regime in place to manage fracking.

However, given the risk to our ground water, and also the inability or unwillingness of governments to measure the fugitive emissions in this industry, we'll actually be presenting a case for the ban of fracking in the Northern Territory today. I'll also bring up some examples from the Northern Territory's experience. My apologies, I haven't got something to submit to you today, but we'll submit relevant links and references for all that we discuss today.

Hon. Justice  
Rachel Pepper:

Thank you.

Jimmy Cocking: I suppose given that this a scientific inquiry, I assume that all members of the panel accept the science of climate change and I therefore don't need to necessarily explain that process to people, but I'm happy to answer questions specifically to that at the end. I also acknowledge that the commission made a strong point about the difference between coal seam gas and shale gas, and while we may not look to the east coast for answers on this, apart from some of the recruitment of the commission of course, we need to be looking to the United States' examples of shale gas and looking at the examples of water pollution, methane release, and largely unreported concerns of people that live in the fracking gas fields across the United States.

We're calling for an urgent ban on hydraulic fracturing in the NT. A ban that will give us immediate and long term security of our aquifers and assist in a



global effort to stabilise our climate and providing longer term options for our children. Rather than committing them to the externalised risk of fossil fuel companies.

The previous inquiry into fracking recommended that we not have a moratorium. Thankfully, we've had a change, and for those who are engaged in what happens here ... the political dialogue around fracking. The new government bringing in a moratorium, and also this inquiry, is very welcome. And also, what's happened in the last, not even six months, in late 2016, the US EPA almost contradicted themselves, acknowledging that rather than there is no risk to drinking water supplies that they found that it did pose an impact on drinking water and posed a risk to water contamination. So as more science comes out about this we need to be looking to the States, who are at least 10 to 20 years ahead of us in this space of the impacts.

Another issue, and this is a somewhat a side issue, but 50 years to the week an article first appeared in the central Centralian Advocate in March, 1967, looking at the prospect of extracting gas from shale by exploding nuclear weapons under the ground. Thankfully, that was not carried out in the Mereenie aquifer as the proponents of the company were hoping to at that time, given that operation gas buggy was being sold to us as the answer to our population and prosperity issues. And thankfully, science came through, that the highly radioactive gas is not necessarily what we wanted. And that demonstrates the importance of us looking to the states and the examples of shale as a reason for us to have a ban.

One of the things, and I've spoken to a couple of the panel members previously about this, but I think that it's critical for people to understand, and you'll hear from the gas lobby today, and following examples of we've been fracking for 40 years in the Northern Territory without any impact, without any negative implications. Just to make it straight, the fracking that we're talking about is not that type of fracking. The fracking we're talking about is horizontal slick water fracking that is not for unconventional shale gas. It's not the hydraulic stimulation of wells, of a conventional gas well. It will be critical for you to understand the difference between those two things.

I had the privilege, or the pleasure, of attending a talk here in 2012 at the CDU campus, and I will send a reference for this article from fracking the centre. They was a spokesperson from Petro frontier this is a company that in 2012 was involved ... The guy that was speaking, whose name I can't remember right now. But he'd been involved with the well out at Magellan at the Palm Valley. And I'll send this article. He was quoted as saying that there had been a leak out there, there had actually been an oil leak in the Palm Valley Mereenie gas field. Quite possibly he alluded to the fact that it could be because of the hydraulic stimulation that had occurred at that time.



And the Water Resources head, John Charles at the time, in his article was concerned about that and the risks that that posed. Because currently, under the mining petroleum act they don't need to let the authorities know until it goes outside of their mineral title. So, we've got an issue here in the Northern Territory where petroleum and mining activities are exempted from Local Water Act and the Waste Management Pollution Control Act. Both of those exemptions bring up significant concerns from us.

And while we are assured from the NT government that they are reviewing and reforming the environmental assessment and approval process and looking to incorporate these acts into one great whole, that is always from our experience here, and I've been in this role for nine years, is always something off into the future rather than something that we can make good, solid, evidence-based decisions on now. So we hope that we can have a better regulatory system, but we are also recognising there are some systemic failures, particularly with the donations the fossil fuel lobby makes to political parties and the influence it that has on the political process. And that's why we're advocating for a ban.

Now, the history of shale gas fracking in the Northern Territory, there's two examples. Again this Petrofrontier company were involved in the Georgina Basin in October, 2012. Out of the three wells that they fracked, of the three separate wells, one had a shallow well failure and the other one was full of hydrogen sulphide. They eventually walked away from that. Then also, the risk of fracking is largely a lot of people talk about the chemicals and the concern they have for the aquifers.

In 2014, there was a chemical spill on the side of the Plenty Highway from ... I don't know the company, but I'll send through this link. It was reported to us. We actually got the phone call before the EPA because people didn't know who to call about the issue. And we fielded the call on that, and the person who reported that felt their nose was burning and mouth was burning when they approached this scene where the chemical had spilled onto the road. The guy in question apparently just kicked some dirt on it and said, "It's a desert, she'll be all right, mate." But it turned out that it was this chemical called Nalco EC9356A, which is a harmful and corrosive agent used in the oil and gas industry. That was found out weeks later by the EPA once they were eventually contacted. Well, they were contacted by us that day, but they eventually got Worksafe on to do an investigation. I can send through a link for that too.

The other concerns that we have is that the fracking issue has created a lot of concern for pastoralists, indigenous land managers, conservationists, and just general, everyday Territorians. 90% of the Northern Territory is dependent on groundwater. That's not the population, but it's the land mass. So that means across 90% of the Northern Territory we depend on water coming from under the ground. Here in Alice Springs we drink water that is 10 to 30,000 old. We drink water that was water in the last ice age, coming from underground. We don't have a great understanding of how



these aquifers interact, both from the surface water and groundwater. We don't know what impacts will happen with an increase of fracking and fracking through the aquifers and through those points where the water intersects with the surface and groundwater.

There's greater concerns as well about the ... While this inquiry is going, and thankfully I can report that there's been a pause for the building of the pipeline across from Tennant Creek to Mount Isa. But the construction of that pipeline, which in their EIS state clearly that their economic justification to open up the Northern Territory to the development of onshore gas, aka fracking. We've always thought that by its construction and the nature of it being there to open up fracking does have some impacts on what comes out of the findings of this inquiry because ultimately the horse is being put before the cart in this instance. Where the pipeline is ultimately a carry-on from the previous government's agenda, which was very much, frack the territory as much as they could. Get as much gas out of the ground and sell it off.

That's also why Territorians have got a lot of concern and a lack of trust around this issue, is because the previous government spent millions of taxpayer dollars on advertising for the industry, not trying to prove to us that it's safe but just trying to convince us that it was safe. There's a very big difference there. And that's what we've been finding, is that with a lot of politicians, previously, have been repeating the same propaganda that we get from the fossil fuel lobby. We've been fracking for 40 years, it's safe.

If we are going to have an ecologically sustainable economy here in the Northern Territory, if we are going to make sure that we have the principles of ESD, the precautionary principle is one that needs to be applied here. In the case of development, it's always up to the people who are concerned to prove that it's unsafe, and it's just generally accepted that it is safe, largely because of the success of industrial lobbying. Here in the Northern Territory we've been subject to that for the last few years as soon as people realised in the industry that people were concerned about the impact that this practice has on their groundwater. If you drive around Alice Springs, if you drive around Katherine, and drive up and down the highway you'll see a lot of the yellow triangle signs. People are concerned.

And while we welcome this inquiry to dig deep into the science of fracking in the Northern Territory, because that's what we need, the previous inquiry was very much a political exercise in delivering a bunch of recommendations that really haven't gone anywhere, so it was another waste of taxpayers dollars. We've got a lot of faith in this process and we will engage thoroughly through it through the chair, but also if other people want to contact us for more information we're very happy to do that. Just excuse me for a sec.

Also, we'd like to draw attention to the fact that the state of Victoria, Tasmania, numerous states, provinces, and nations across the world ban



fracking. And I will be imploring the inquiry to look at that as a serious option. Even though we may have significant gas reserves it doesn't mean that we need to ... We don't need to sell it. Given that there's science out there, there's many papers that now detail that we need to keep 80% of known fossil fuel reserves in the ground if we are to have any hope of maintaining warming below 2 degrees. Given that it's 80% of known reserves it would be nonsense to actually open the territory up to fracking and exploration for gas that we're never going to be able to get out.

The other significant issues in fracking that we've got, and these are examples from the United States. The impacts to the environment through pollution, through invisible methane emissions, the fugitive emissions alone are the reasons why we call for banning of shale gas fracking. The fact that Australia does not even yet measure and report on shale gas fugitive emissions begs the question as to how we can allow this to happen. The perceived benefits of using gas over coal for electricity generation is undermined by these fugitive emissions. That in some instances in the United States have been found to be up to 9% of production can go into the air as waste. Given that methane is 73 times stronger as a greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide it means that we need to ban fracking.

The other issues as well around surface water pollution. We know that here there's very low likelihood of re-injection of fracking fluid into the ground, which causes increased seismicity. We've seen an increase in earthquakes in Oklahoma and, I think it was, Pennsylvania recently. There's increasing reports from the United States about the impact of fracking in increased earthquakes. While we don't believe that that is something that may be critical here because we would hope that there would be no re-injection going on. As we know with both the ... Well, what's happened here in the Territory are examples already around accidents, the impacts of accidents, given the remote location, given the lack of capability and capacity of our emergency services to be able to deal with these sorts of issues, and the distance and the time it takes to get there, we again call for a ban on fracking so that we don't have to deal with these issues.

Although the dollar signs may look good from a distance, up close our dependency on water and a multitude of industries that depend on our intact natural landscapes, whether it's pastoralism, whether it's fishing, whether it's farming, whether it's tourism, whether it's indigenous cultural burning of landscape or the protection of nature and our potential carbon economy as well are all at threat if we do choose to head down this direction. The human health impacts of shale gas fracking are also well documented. And I present a document from the states called the "The Urgent Case for a Ban on Fracking." I'll send a copy of this to all of you. I hope that that will be taken on board because we need to be looking to the States, maybe not for leadership on this issue, but at least for looking at the impacts on what's happened over the last 20 years.



There's also no baseline studies, so currently there's ... The previous government approved a gas fracking well at [inaudible 00:17:25] up in the north, up in the North, up in the Roper area. That was approved to happen the day after the election, knowing that if the current government got in they would have a moratorium policy but on their first day there'd be a frack happening. This is the way this industry works, whether it's towing pipelines through Tennant Creek every day to create the sense of fait accompli, and the communities who are at risk have no power to be able to make a difference in this. This is the way these companies work across the world.

There is a world gas glut. The reason why we're talking about even fracking or a pipeline connecting Territory gas is being sold to us to support our friends and families in New South Wales and the eastern states who are undergoing a gas crisis because of the lack of gas being available to power generation and manufacturing there. But I draw attention to the panel that that is only there because of the export of gas from Queensland which is changing the nature of the marketplace for gas on the eastern seaboard. The price of gas domestically has trebled. I remember being able to fill up the car for 30 cents a litre when it was LPG, now it's \$1.40. Why is that? It's because we've started exporting gas and opening up our markets to the international price.

If we were to open up fracking and piping it out to the East Coast, Jemena has already got plans, so the company looking to do the gas pipeline. They've already got plans to connect the gas from there to [inaudible 00:19:03] out to Gladstone and actually put it out for export. We recognise that there's been a lot of spin around this, by us opening up for gas we will be helping of the rest of the nation and this is nation building projects. But ultimately, all we will be doing is helping the multinational gas companies and we implore the inquiry to dig deep on this. We will send through as many references as we can. But we also urge you to look beyond some of that because a lot of our people here in the Northern Territory won't be able to make a written submission and it will be critical to talk to them about the impacts that this industry will have on their livelihoods and their future.

I welcome that you're seeing a lot of regional centres. We need to make sure that this industry cannot go ahead, because after many years of experience we've learnt that we cannot trust them. And the system that's in place at the moment where the mine's managing department oversee the compliance, they're under-resourced and they're hopelessly conflicted. While in one part they're supposed to be promoting the industry and then on the other side they are supposed to be enforcing compliance. So, we've got a system somewhat broken here currently. And while the government has committed to fixing it it's a long hard road of reform, particularly when we've got previous chief ministers who are highly embedded in the oil and gas sector lobbying government from the inside while also getting lobbied on the outside from the oil and gas sector.



Thank you so much for the opportunity to speak here today. I hope I've given you some food for thought, and some questions raised. We will be submitting probably before April 30, I think is the deadline, and we will have a comprehensive list of references there for you to follow up to demonstrate that we're coming from an evidence-based and not speaking purely on the emotiveness of this issue. Thank you, panel, and I'll welcome any questions that you may have.

Hon. Justice  
Rachel Pepper:

Thank you very much, Mr. Cocking. Yes, I look forward to those references in due course. Any questions?

Ms. Jane Coram

Well, thank you for that. I was just wondering if you could tease out a little bit more of the comments you made around the difference between fracking for unconventional resources versus conventional ones? You made a comment that it's critical to understand the differences. If you have any references to site that we would appreciate them but for now if you could just spell those out.

Jimmy Cocking:

Yeah, ultimately the conventional gas reserves are when you essentially drill down, there's a pocket of gas trapped within a sandstone layer, generally. They drill a hole, it's released and it just comes up at its own volition. Sometimes those wells need some ... Like almost when you use a plunger on the drain to get a bit of movement happening and get it to flow. That's the sort of hydraulic stimulation that's happened out at Palm Valley. The normal unconventional shale gas fracking which we're talking about include drilling depths up to 2 kilometres and more, and then going horizontally as well, using a range of undisclosed chemicals, some disclosed chemicals, but undisclosed chemicals guar gum... excuse me and others which are our greatest concern around the impact on our aquifers but also the surface water, and particularly in the north up here.

In Barkley we had a 50-year flood just recently and we're expecting that there'll be more rainfall here in years to come, and unpredictable rainfall that leads to fracking and the storage of those chemicals in those wells in the basins after they do the frack that then those chemicals can be mobilised into waterways if there's heavy rainfall that comes through, which we can't say won't happen.

So that's the difference, is that one's pretty much a relatively benign pumping of the gas using water, and the other one that we're talking about is slick water fracking which is what the ... I think I've made that ... Hopefully that's enough, and if so we can detail more of that. Most of that conversation around Palm Valley is based on an article that was ... There was an information session by Petrofrontier, which is a company that was operating here, took over Magellan lease at Palm Valley. They also had some titles up in the Georgina Basin. They're also the company that did the frack that had the shallow well failure and the hydrogen sulphide failure of their well as well. They're a Canadian company.



But the guy that was there spoke quite plainly about the differences of both those, but also outlined, which was a surprise for myself, about the well failure that had happened out at Mereenie. So that's something that I urge you to consider and look into more, because you can't find much on the public record about this. A lot of it sits under the Department of Mines and Energy and that is not necessarily released to other departments either whose jurisdictions are protecting groundwater. I can send you the link to the newspaper article from that particular information.

Ms. Jane Coram

Thank you. In regards to those well failures that you mention, can you give any more details around the actual failure? You mentioned one was a shallow well failure and one was abandoned due to hydrogen sulphide. Do you know anymore about the details than that?

Jimmy Cocking:

All I know anecdotally, as it is in small towns. A person I used to live down the road from was actually working on a site there and witnessed it. They had previously been a proponent of the gas industry but after seeing the impact of that ... And from my understanding the well failed shallows, between maybe 6 metres under the ground or something, but that was ... I mean, you're thinking massive amounts of water, up to 20 million litres, pushed out at high pressure, and then the well busting open. This is a risk as well with the Chinese free trade agreement. Others sorts of things that we're also looking at, having lower quality steel and other implications for this industry. We have to consider that every frack is an experiment. Every single time they do this it's under controlled circumstances, and while they do understand a lot about what may or may not happen it is an experiment. These guys at the Petrofrontier at the shallow well failure, where they pop the water down and the well blew out, and this guy said it was a pretty scary situation.

The other one ... I know this is just really from news reports that I'm drawing from. The hydrogen sulphide ultimately renders the gas not usable, it's often a rotten egg smell that can happen. And that's also a negative implication for the industry too, is that there are these releases of gases that we can both smell but not smell. The ones that we can't smell are the biggest issues for climate. That's one of the reasons why we consider it should be banned. Ultimately, we're experimenting with our groundwater, and when we've got 90% of the Northern Territory dependent on that groundwater anybody who considers themselves are being guided somewhat by the precautionary principle in the way that we make decisions needs to acknowledge that that potential catastrophic risk isn't worth allowing this industry to prevail.

Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper:

Anyone else?

Dr. Vaughan Beck:

I note that you tend to supply references, that's very good. [inaudible 00:27:24] and I note that you made reference to the USA EPA report, the more recent report in the [inaudible 00:27:30]. You were talking about





emissions and saying that one of the main reasons why you want to see it banned. Can you elaborate more on that aspect for me, please?

Jimmy Cocking: Yeah. Methane is an invisible, tasteless, smell-less gas, so unless you actually have the right technology to be able to see it you wouldn't know it's there. What's happened in the States and more recently here, I think it was they did some of it in some of the coal seam gas fields, but actually looking at having a camera that can actually use infrared technology to identify gas leaks. I'm trying to think where else the actual specific location in the States. But they've done it in the States and found massive methane clouds over areas where frack fields are, and also moving across the nation there in the States. And the implications that that has, the health risks of that range from bloody noses to long-term ... Who knows? Because we're in an experiment here, particularly the States, around the impacts of fracking.

But methane being a much stronger climate acting gas or greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide, and the fact that we're not measuring it here in Australia ... Well, you have a look at the measurements that are currently being taken around methane and fugitive emissions is very low, which points to the fact that there's under-reporting going on. And until we see some leadership for the federal government around this, because it is a national issue where we've got both frack wells, whether it's coals and gas or shale gas, happening across the country, and if we're not reporting these fugitive emissions then how can we have any understanding of the impact that we're having towards our Paris agreement goals of reducing emissions.

We would urge the inquiry to look deeply into that. I would guarantee that nobody in the Northern Territory involved in this industry would be currently looking at their fugitive emissions. I'd love to be corrected on that. But I urge you to at least dig deep, and so I could be corrected on that. But there's very little reporting going on. The risk out here as well is the fact that there's very long distances between places and very long distances between where compliance staff for mines and energy may reside and where they may have to get to. There is an implicit understanding that the industry will do the right thing, but they can only do the right thing if they're legislated or regulated do so. And if we don't have the regulations to bring them to account, particularly on measuring fugitive emissions and those sorts of things, then at this stage we can't allow that industry to continue if we are to have any chance, or any hope, of being a contributor to the global climate effort to reduce our emissions to zero by 2050, is ultimately where we have to go.

Dr. Vaughan Beck: Thank you very much for that.

Jimmy Cocking: No worries.

Dr. David Jones: Water supplier integrity is a really key issue in this community and there are a number of aquifers around here which are currently non-potable. Fracking, for example, can use that non-potable water. One of the possible



offsets of the industry ... I'm not saying I'm an advocate for it by any means. But what I'm saying, one of the possible issues we need to look at is offsetting here where currently unusable water could be treated some of it used fracking in a [inaudible 00:31:13] for Alice Springs. Now, I don't know what the attitude would be to that and be of the community towards that kind of arrangement, because this is one of the issues we need to consider in all the costs and benefits and otherwise for this industry. A lot of people might say, "Yeah, no, this is contaminated water that was ... We don't like clean water." Could you give us a feel, maybe, from your constituency how people might react to that kind of arrangement?

Jimmy Cocking:

I think given the lack of resources consistently made to the departments who ultimately regulate our groundwater supplies, there's still very little-known about the interactivity between aquifers, whether they're salty or non-salty or potable or non-potable. They don't know if you take the salty water out that then freshwater will flow in. Then we end up with a similar sort of problem. An example just recently, there's been a water allocation plan done for the Western Davenport Ranges, so just sort of about 400 kilometres north of town. Ti Tree aquifers, and also interconnected there. What they've found in the last five years of doing this research is that there's a lot more connectivity, whereas they thought they were separate aquifers. They've actually now found that they're not. And why? Because they needed to do more research because they wanted to be able to determine what impacts of increasing the water allocation would be for water culture and the implications that would have done the stream. And they've since found that it's connected.

I think that we don't have enough science on the groundwater systems here to be able to categorically say that. And while we do recognise and support projects that look at ways to be able to offset their potable water use, we need to understand what the implications of that would be because we currently don't know enough about it to be able to go, "Well, this is salty and this one's not", and that we can take the salty water. We got a similar example here. We just went out as part of the water advisory committee of Alice Springs region. We went out to the SAT ponds out here, which is the soil aquifer treatment ponds which is where recycled water is put into an aquifer. So, it's class A water and it's put in there for storage. But what they found is that when they put that water into the aquifer it's actually coming out saltier than what they intended. So the agricultural benefits of that are less well understood.

And another one that comes from the impacts of produced water, which is commonly used with coal seam gas but it's also used with shale gas, with the water that comes back up after the frack. There has recently been a report in the States about the ... This is not in Australia these companies were selling their produced water to food companies and farmers to grow food from produced water, and are now finding that there are potential health risks and clusters that are happening as a result of people eating that food, and people working in the industry with that water. While I acknowledge



that's a very ... We need to look at this in totality. We can't look at these issues from a reductionist approach in the way that we've done science in the past where we look at this bit here without actually looking at the implications.

I think if this industry's going to have any credible ability to operate with a social licence in this jurisdiction we need to be looking at things, both the cumulative impacts of this industry, both on water and climate and looking at our aquifer systems as a whole. Because if we look at them in reductionist approaches we can sort of offset problems but cause other issues elsewhere. I thank you for the question. I hope that that provided some sort of ...

Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper:

Yes. This will probably be the second last question.

Dr. Alan Andersen:

Alan Andersen. Water is obviously a dominant issue here. I'm a terrestrial ecologist so I'm just wondering what you see as the issues relating to the terrestrial ecosystems and biodiversity.

Jimmy Cocking:

Well, some of those issues ... I'm reporting from some anecdotal reports of people that live down in the Simpson Strezlecki area, down towards Moomba, where the Moomba gas field is. And people have reported that there's a lot more roadkill down that way than in other areas because the animals are confused and somehow the potential of the gas and the smells have some impact on their livelihood. But obviously with any kind of dislocation of landscapes, whether it's through pipelines or gas fields is going to have implications. The sounds, the flaring, those sorts of industrial processes are going to have impacts. As far as actually having the data, well, there's very little. When I say that the water department is under-resourced. Well, the flora and fauna department here in the NT is even more so.

I think that's definitely something that we need to be looking into much more. The impacts of fracking, whether it's got to do with surface pollution as the result of spills and then that getting into aquatic ecosystems is probably one of the biggest threats. But also, given the impacts of methane we don't know what's ... I haven't looked into it personally yet, but one of the impacts of methane on animals in a higher concentration of methane, is that going to have some impact? There's a lot more research that needs to be done, and given the precautionary principal, the burden of proof is on the industry to prove that it's safe, rather than for us to prove it's unsafe. These sorts of questions are the ones that need to be answered through good, solid, research. I look forward to hopefully ... That we can get some more information about that, but largely the impacts around water, and I think also the sand and gas is going to be the big issues around the terrestrial ecosystems.

But also, in the Northern Territory, you may or may not know, that there is no ... With an environmental impact study there's no reporting on



arthropods here, so there's no impacts on insects or anything here that they considered in an EIS. And obviously that has downstream effects, as they are prey for many animals. Until we also have a better understanding of what impacts the gas industry will have on insect life we're also not going to be able to know the full impacts it will have on biodiversity.

Hon. Justice  
Rachel Pepper:

As Chair, I'm going to have the Chair's prerogative of last question. Mr. Cocking, one of the examples you've given ... Many of the concerns you've raised point to, on your view, it appears a real failure of the regulatory framework to govern any existing industry, and potential future industry. Let's assume that you could construct a sufficiently robust regulatory framework of governance. So, you have an independent regulatory system and so on. Is your position still, "No, absolute ban on fracking"?

Jimmy Cocking:

That position has shifted, because we were of that opinion when we submitted to these inquiries previously. That the robust regulatory system would cut the mustard. Since then we've signed the Paris Accord and we have an obligation to our children and their children's children's children to make sure that we maintain and stabilise the climate the climate by reducing gas emissions. Given the current system seems unable or unwilling, and maybe even a future system, it may be able to assess the impacts of fugitive emissions and the scale of that. But given that the uncertainty around that is there we will have to say at this point we'd be calling for a ban. Whether that's got a sunrise clause on it, and obviously that can always change with a change of government. But our concern is that the current government, while all credit to their intent and where they want to take this and their commitment to reform, it's a very challenging cultural change for departments that may not necessarily want to change, or they've also got conflicts in wanting to change.

So, until the system changes within thoughts to the fossil fuel industry on the political process we're calling for a ban. And that position has changed. We are very considered in the way that we go about making policy and decisions within our organisation. And given that previously when we had a government that was rampantly trying to get fracked gas out of the ground any way they could, under the CLP government, we advocated they needed a stronger regulatory system. Why? Because we thought that that was the only way that we were going to be able to get some improvement, because that previous government was not listening to ... If we called for a ban they would have just stopped listening.

We're very happy to see that a lot of the recommendations from our previous submission to the previous inquiry have now become policy positions of the Labour Party, which is very welcoming. But we also understand now that we have urgency around the climate issues and personally, and professionally, we don't think that there is time to waste giving into the uncertainty of this industry. We need to actually lay down the line and say, "Let's ban it. Let's get on with the renewable energy future for



the NT, and let's not condemn future generations to climate chaos as a result of unrestricted carbon emissions."

Ms. Jane Coram: Thank you.

Hon. Justice  
Rachel Pepper: Thank you very much, Mr. Cocking. Thank you.

Jimmy Cocking: Thank you.