

Katherine Town Council

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Our Ref: Government Relations \ Agency \ Hydraulic Fracturing Taskforce

27 April 2017

The Honourable Justice Rachel Pepper
Chair
Hydraulic Fracturing Taskforce
GPO Box 4396
Darwin NT 0801

Dear Justice Pepper

KATHERINE TOWN COUNCIL SUBMISSION TO THE SCIENTIFIC INQUIRY INTO THE HYDRAULIC FRACTURING OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important inquiry which stands to have a significant potential impact on our Katherine community and the region economically, socially and environmentally. Katherine Town Council endorse the consultative processes being undertaken by the Northern Territory Government into hydraulic fracturing to date.

The Town of Katherine is currently home to around 11,000 people and is the service centre for a region of around 25,000 people. The town is the centre of a number of major industries including tourism, agriculture, defence, conventional mining as well as government and non-government agencies. A number of these industries rely heavily on the considerable water resources currently available from the aquifers that lie within the region.

Our primary focus is on safeguarding Katherine and our region and our greatest concern is the effect of any potential contamination of the environment that could adversely impact our residents and our industries. Ultimately, as one of the caretakers for future generations of Katherine and the region, this is our greatest responsibility and one that we entrust the Taskforce to safeguard.

Council has a current resolution that was adopted at our 24 February 2015 Council meeting with respect to a moratorium, which reads as follows:

That Council support the community of Katherine and request a moratorium on unconventional oil and gas mining/ fracking within the whole of the Katherine Municipal Boundaries.

CARRIED: 5/2

Alderman Phillips and Mayor Miller wished it noted they voted against the motion.

A second Council resolution on 26 April 2017 endorsed the contents and submission of this letter to the Hydraulic Fracturing Taskforce.

Overall, on behalf of our community, Council sanction the ongoing moratorium on hydraulic fracturing of onshore unconventional reservoirs within the Katherine Town Council boundary. Further to our previous submissions (refer to our previous letter of 12 October

2016), our meeting of 21 February 2017 and in line with the recommendations from other organisations, Council makes the following points for consideration by the Taskforce:

1. In line with the strong position of our community, we seek a boundary to be placed around the Katherine Town Council that precludes any hydraulic fracturing of onshore unconventional reservoirs within the municipality.
2. Should hydraulic fracturing proceed within the Northern Territory, there must be a period of robust and exhaustive consultation, and the full implementation and ongoing rigorous enforcement of best-practice regulation. Adequate resources must be set aside to achieve these goals. Katherine Town Council seek to be involved in as much of the process as practicable to best represent our community.
3. The regulation of fracking and associated activity needs to have an appropriate level of independence. The oversight of compliance with the regulations must give stakeholders and the public confidence that the regulations are being fully adhered to and cannot be evaded.
4. A chemical spill during transportation of high risk materials to or from the drill site is believed to be one of the main hazards associated with fracking. Regulations should include either specific reference to conditions for the transportation of chemicals, or clearly described links to existing regulations guiding the safe transportation of chemicals throughout the Northern Territory.
5. Where possible, regulations should guide industries choice of chemicals to reduce the risks associated with a chemical spill and/or contamination of water resources. Where a number of chemicals are available to perform a single function and some are relatively low risk, any high-risk chemicals should be prohibited on the basis that there are acceptable low risk alternatives.
6. The protection of all aquifers must be the highest priority in the regulatory framework. For example, there could be a regulated minimum distance between any potable water resources and any fracking activity. It is worth noting that although Council seek a moratorium on hydraulic fracturing within the municipality boundary, the aquifers that the area relies on run considerably south of the municipality boundary. It is therefore logical to extend the protection to these aquifers as they are one of the primary causes for concern.
7. Wherever possible, fracking activities should only be undertaken using non-potable water resources. The use of potable water resources should only be possible following a strict and fully transparent approvals process. The impacts on ground water resources of any water use should be measured and managed proactively.
8. Regulations need to be conservative and appropriate for the local conditions. For example, the engineering and construction of waste water ponds must account for both extremes of rainfall events.
9. The necessity to negotiate with landholder's biosecurity plans that guide all land access for fracking and associated activities must be prescribed in the regulations. Biosecurity risks range from weed infestation through to the spread of pests and diseases which threaten agricultural productivity.
10. Appropriate industry bond arrangements must be in place to ensure that the capital exists to address any legacy issues.

11. The benefits of the production of these resources should flow on to benefit the Australian local market as well as the overseas markets.

Please do not hesitate to meet with or call with any queries on 8972 5500. We look forward to being included in the future consultation

Yours sincerely



Robert Jennings

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Copy Sandra Nelson MLA, Member for Katherine
Hon Warren Snowden MP, Member of the Australian House of Representatives

Note

Points from this letter have been sourced from a number of articles including presentations given and points made by officers at Regional Development Australia, NT Chapter.