

Submission to Inquiry into Unconventional Gas (UCG) in Victoria

From: John Langer, Beryl Langer

We wish to make a submission to this inquiry, and wish to suggest that:

- 1/ The current moratorium on extraction of unconventional gas be extended
- 2/ If this moratorium is eventually lifted, limit the places where this extraction takes place and before this extraction is permitted, do thorough-going and independent expert audited research.
- 3/ The definition of UCG for this inquiry and subsequent moratoria and/or permissions for extraction include coal seam gas, tight gas, shale gas and underground coal gasification

To start, let us say that we are not experts in this field. And, no doubt there will be many submissions that will argue on the basis of expertise that the extraction of UCG should *not* be permitted.

Our submission is based on reading, discussions, and our involvement in a local campaign, NoBTS66, which was about opposition to the building of an industrial sized electrical substation in the middle of a high residential and recreational zone in East Brunswick.

Despite the seeming distance between the extraction of UCG and the expansion of the Brunswick Terminal Station, there is in fact a parallel. Both connect to inappropriate development and over-turning of community values. Both also proceed on the basis of not facing a future where the current reliance on fossil fuels will be increasingly replaced through the inevitable transition to renewables. And both are driven by corporate interests searching for profit at the expense of community and innovation.

There are a multitude of comprehensive studies already done on what follows, so I will just outline my points briefly

1/ Social license:

The UCG extraction industry is deeply mistrusted across many communities in Victoria. This is also the case overseas, especially in the United States. It is an industry that potentially can divide communities, and also result in declining property values and other financial impacts (livelihoods based in tourism for example). There are also issues around confidentiality agreements that companies frequently require, that which inhibit any community concerns after extraction begins. There are also questions of remediation after the extraction is done (Hazelwood mine fire is an example)

2/ Health concerns

These have been widely documented both in Australia and overseas.

See for example <http://dea.org.au/topics/category/CSG>
<http://www.ntn.org.au/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Submission-SA-Fracking-Inquiry.pdf>

3/ Environmental impacts

These have been widely canvassed, and there will be more thorough submissions covering these areas so I will list a few that stand out

- Toxic chemicals released into underground aquifer and into the air
- Gas emissions adding to carbon footprint
- Excessive water use (especially in time of drought)
- Earthquake danger
- Failure of gas wells

4/ Potential effect on agriculture

This has also been well documented, and these effects include

- contamination of water with toxic chemicals,
- poisoning livestock and contamination of agricultural products
- increase in groundwater and soil salinity
- depletion of groundwater

To summarize: we believe a choice has to be made at this point in the state's history of industrialization and development. Extraction of UCG does not combine with agriculture, food security, tourism and community values. Nor does it set a framework for the state's energy and manufacturing future.

There are, of course, extraction companies and economists who will argue differently. This issue is not a matter of a few years and the creation of wealth and jobs in the short term. Victoria, as a state, and as a community, needs to have stewardship for future generations, and the way to do this is to plan accordingly now. That does not include capitulating to mining interests.