



Parliamentary Committee
Inquiry into Unconventional Gas in Victoria

10th July 2015

Dear Committee,

My name is Lucy Foley. I am a resident in the municipality of Moreland in Melbourne, social work student and community development worker, who has worked with a wide range of groups and communities throughout metropolitan and rural and regional Victoria for over fifteen years.

I am writing as I am deeply concerned about, and opposed to, unconventional gas mining in Victoria, including coal seam gas, tight gas, shale gas and underground gas mining. The many adverse impacts of unconventional gas mining on local ecologies, agriculture, water and the health and wellbeing of communities are well-known. I am joined by many other Victorians in opposition to this industry and urge you to listen to your constituents and register how broad our level of grave concern is. Regulations cannot make this industry 'clean', it destroys land and it destroys communities, and it needs to be banned permanently and in total in Victoria. A total ban will guarantee protection of our precious and vulnerable landscape and environment, as well as our vitally important agricultural and tourism industries, and enable new investments such as renewable energy.

My response to the inquiry's Terms of Reference follows :

1. the prospectivity of Victoria's geology for commercial sources of onshore unconventional gas;

Unconventional gas places water, farmland, community health, food security, environment and jobs in agriculture and tourism in Victoria at risk, for little or no gain. There is no commercial gain for Victoria in sourcing unconventional gas. Cost benefit analysis of the industry should consider not only the economic upside of sourcing and exporting unconventional gas, but also the downside in terms of loss of property values and health impacts, in both the immediate and long term contexts.

2. the environmental, land productivity and public health risks, risk mitigations and residual risks of onshore unconventional gas activities;

The Australian Climate Health Alliance (2013) report that the risks to public health from unconventional gas mining may equal those caused by asbestos mining in Australia in the 1950s. In particular, they report that early Australian

research into fugitive emissions from coal seam gas drilling in proximity to residences in Queensland indicate that “detection of dangerous air toxics around residents' homes combined with the ongoing reporting of adverse health symptoms should be treated seriously and a scientifically valid investigation should be undertaken which ensures independence and is based on a rigorous monitoring program which is broad-spectrum, high -periodicity and long-term ” (National Toxics Network, 2013)

The CHA also report that risks extend beyond health to climate security, as unconventional gas involves emissions. To quote the CHA, “market pressure for a shift to conventional fossil gas as an energy source to replace coal and claims that gas is “clean energy” should be viewed with caution. There is emerging evidence that the emissions from gas are much higher than reported levels, with a recent paper indicating gas accounts for 40% of anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions in the US. New methods for evaluating methane emissions from gas have produced a two fold increase in reported emissions from the gas industry in the US. In addition, gas from shale deposits is estimated to have a higher greenhouse signature than coal. (Carey, 2012 ;Howarth et al 2011, 2012). This indicates that a wide scale shift to gas may exacerbate the onset of dangerous climate change and its accompanying risks to human health.”

3. the coexistence of onshore unconventional gas activities with existing land and water uses, including —

(c) any implications for local and regional development, investment and jobs;

The unconventional gas mining industry is capital rather than labour intensive. The jobs created by the industry are largely contract jobs, and not full-time. Another important point to consider here, however, is the implication of unconventional gas on current jobs in existing industries and the negative impacts on existing land-users such as farmers and tourism operators, a downturn in existing industries will lead to job losses. New jobs should not come at the expense of existing jobs.

4. the ability of potential onshore unconventional gas resources contributing to the State’s overall energy sources including —

(b) an affordable energy source for domestic consumers; and

Unconventional gas is unlikely to be an affordable energy source for consumers. The cost of the process used to release gas from coal seam of rock is high compared with conventional gas, and the likelihood, with plans to export the gas, is that Victorian consumers will be competing with international energy prices in the future. A better option would be for Victorians to be encouraged to reduce our need for gas, through initiatives such as better energy efficiency standards in new homes and government funded energy efficient retrofit programs for existing houses.

5. the resource knowledge requirements and policy and regulatory

safeguards that would be necessary to enable exploration and development of onshore unconventional gas resources

Unconventional gas mining has failed to be proven safe elsewhere within Australia or overseas. The industry has had ample time to prove that their practices are safe, but have been unable to do so. Allowing unconventional gas mining in Victoria now will lock us into a dangerously destructive industry and dangerously high greenhouse gas emissions. There is ample evidence that the industry will always pose a risk, even with regulation. This risk is too great for Victoria and Victorians.

One again, I reiterate, unconventional gas mining needs to be banned permanently and in total in Victoria. A total ban will guarantee protection of our landscape and environment, as well as our vitally important agricultural and tourism industries, and enable new investments such as renewable energy.

Sincerely,

Lucy Foley