

Keir Delaney,
 Secretary, Environment and Planning Committee,
 Unconventional Gas Inquiry,
 Parliament House,
 Spring Street,
 East Melbourne,
 Vic 3002.

Dear Committee members,

I am a Victorian farmer from the Bellarine Peninsula with a business (olive production) that depends on the local tourism industry for its success. Before retirement, I worked for the Australian Government.

I am totally against any form of unconventional gas mining (including coal seam gas, tight gas, shale gas & underground coal gasification), for the following reasons.

1. To begin with I believe it is short-sighted and foolhardy, in prospecting for unconventional gas, to risk our water resources, our farmland, community health, food security, jobs in agriculture and tourism, and, not least importantly, the environment generally, for what might amount to little or no financial gain. Nor do I believe that financial gain should be an overriding concern. I believe environmental and quality of life concerns are far more important.
2. Indeed the environmental issues are the most important to me. Experience elsewhere, such as in the USA and Queensland, clearly show the negative consequences and residual risks. A government that sacrifices long-term land productivity and puts public health at risk for the short-term gain of private enterprise is an irresponsible one.
3. Our farming activities would not coexist with exploitation of unconventional gas. All the infrastructure necessary would make this an ugly place to live and work (instead of a beautiful one) and we would rather close down our business than operate in such an ugly environment. And that would have an incremental impact on the local tourism economy, as our olive grove, well-cared for farm, and business, all contribute to the attraction of the Bellarine Peninsula for tourists. In addition, we are endeavouring to run the farm according to best practice environmental guidelines, and this would no longer be possible with unconventional gas production on the property. So the Bellarine would lose our farm and business entirely. Plus the jobs it creates and supports – the many small outlets that sell our product, and the casual labour we employ at harvest, pruning and other peak times.

I also object vehemently against gas activities being permitted to be carried out on my property against my will. That harks of autocracy or communism at its worst. I do not want these people to step foot on my land.

There is also the issue of decreased property values. The intrinsic values of land here include the pleasant outlook and the fertility of the land. Gas activities would severely compromise both of these.

4. The gas would not be cost effective for consumers. Unconventional gas is a fossil fuel and by definition, unconventional gases are harder to extract than conventional gas. Because they need to be fracked to release the gas from the coal seam or rock, the energy cost of the gas is high compared with conventional LNG.
 Additionally, with the government planning to export massive volumes of gas through ports in Queensland, Victorian consumers will be competing with international energy prices in coming year. So UCG is unlikely to be an affordable energy source for consumers. A much better option is to look at ways we can reduce our need to use gas (for instance through ensuring better energy efficiency

standards in new homes and a government-funded energy efficiency retrofit program for existing houses). Even better, would be to support renewable energy sources, including geothermal (which after establishment can provide almost free heating).

Relative to renewable energy, carbon dioxide emissions from unconventional gas sources are a grave concern. Emissions and fugitive emissions from UCG are much worse than for renewable energy sources. Air pollution from gas treatment plants and the impact on human and environmental health is also an issue that concerns me.

5. I believe that policy and regulatory safeguards that would be necessary to enable exploration and development of onshore unconventional gas resources would be inadequate and unreliable. I would have no confidence in them. The industry (regardless of regulation) has failed to be proven safe elsewhere. It has had a long time to prove that its practices are safe and yet have been unable to do so. The industry, however much it can reduce its risks by regulation, will always pose a risk and any risk is too great.

I recommend that Victoria ban all unconventional gas drilling permanently. Doing so would give certainty to existing agriculture and tourism, making Victoria a more attractive place for investments in these industries as well as in renewable energy technologies, which would in the long term be safer for the environment, and cheaper for the consumer. Banning unconventional gas would create more long term jobs in sustainable industries.

Yours sincerely,

Rosalind Ellinger

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7th July 2015