

### Submission for Unconventional Gas inquiry

To the Environment and Planning Committee,

I am writing to you on behalf of Gasfield Free South West. This is a group of farmers that has been growing since April 2014, in light of increasing evidence suggesting that Unconventional Gas Mining would pose an enormous risk to our way of life here. We live in the Byaduk, Byaduk North, Wallacedale and Branxholme area, south of Hamilton, the area covered by Petroleum Licence Permit 150 (PEP150).

On Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2015, our community came together in order to officially declare ourselves 'Gasfield free'. Around 250 landholders took time out from their busy Autumn sowing season to bring their tractors to help make a large sign saying "FOOD NOT GAS".



As you can see from the above picture, there is no social licence for this industry in our area.

As I am writing this on behalf of our group, I would like to make it clear that although you may not receive submissions from each and every one of our residents, it is clear that the industry is not welcome in our area.

I am very frustrated with the notion that I need to prove the industry is not safe, but it seems it is the only way to move ahead. The rest of my submission is taken from the speech I made at our declaration day, and sums up exactly what I want to say now as part of this Inquiry. I would welcome the opportunity to come to the Inquiry when it comes to South West Victoria. Thank you for taking the time to read this.

*My name is Aggie Stevenson, and with my partner Jules, and our three beautiful girls, I run part of the family farm that I grew up on, not far from here. We run sheep for wool and meat, and like every other farmer in the world, are totally reliant on having a clean source of water year round. I live here because this is my heritage, it's my work, but above all, it's where we brought our girls home from hospital when they born... that is what makes this place special to me.*

*In March last year, I attended a meeting in Digby, about unconventional gas mining, or fracking. Like so many others, I had my head firmly wedged in the ground, thinking that fracking was just another environmental nightmare that our QLD cousins were having to battle. 'Never' I told myself 'in a million years, would any government be greedy enough to allow such a devastating industry to establish down here, in what Major Mitchell so long ago described as the 'Australia Felix''. I should have remembered the saying 'never say never'. As I learn more about the impacts the unconventional gas industry (also known as on-shore gas) has had on communities not only in Australia, but around the world, I hear similar statements like this.*

*Apparently, it doesn't matter how productive or sacred an area is, to our leaders this land that we call 'home', they call 'mining prospects'.*

*After the Digby meeting, a community meeting was organised, with the aim of informing local landholders from the Byaduk and North Byaduk area, about an existing petroleum exploration permit (PEP 150) that covers an area of 3,253km<sup>2</sup> which includes the communities of Byaduk, North Byaduk, Wallacedale, Branxholme, Macarthur, Bessiebelle, Heywood, Portland, Digby, Cape Bridgewater and Tyrendarra, to name a few.*

*Twelve of us from Byaduk and Wallacedale surveyed every single property in North Byaduk, Byaduk and Wallacedale to ask one simple question: Do you want your road or land to be Gasfield free? The answer was yes, they did. 96% of the 219 landholders from Byaduk, North Byaduk and district said yes while an incredible 100% of the 70 Wallacedale landholders said yes to this simple, but critical question.*

*Knowing that Digby had been surveyed, the next logical area to go was Branxholme. So, we held another community information evening in Branxholme. Similar to Byaduk, a willing group of volunteers offered their support to survey the Branxholme area, along with much of Grassdale. The results were the same, with a whopping 95.2% of the 209 Branxholme and district residents surveyed saying yes to being Gasfield free.*

*To understand why we held these meetings in the first place, it is important to understand the perceived risks associated with the gas mining industry. These risks are too big for our leaders to ignore. There is so much anecdotal evidence already, but more so, there is mounting scientific evidence coming out around the world showing just how unsafe this industry is. So much so, that countries and states are starting to place extended moratoriums or full bans on the industry, with some of these being:*

- Tasmania: 5 year moratorium
- Wales: moratorium
- Scotland: moratorium
- New Brunswick, Canada: long term moratorium

- New York State: ban
- France: ban
- Bulgaria: ban
- Germany: 7 year ban

*There are so many risks that to mention them all now would be impossible, but when it comes down to it, there are three key risks to us as a community, and these are:*

- Ground water and surface water contamination – Santos in NSW has revealed that they contaminated an aquifer with uranium at levels that make the aquifer unusable for thousands of years, with levels being 20 times higher than safe drinking water levels. 30-40 million litres of water is used each time one well is fracked, and they can be fracked up to 9 times in their lifetime. If an Olympic swimming pool holds one million litres, then try to imagine needing to empty 30-40 Olympic swimming pools every time one well is fracked, then multiply that by 9 times, and you have a staggering 270-360 million litres required just to frack one well. And of course, there are 100s if not thousands of wells in an operational Gasfield. This does not include the amount of water required to drill each well. Where will this water come from? The water we have stock and domestic licences for already to run our farms? A report has just come out saying that in the Hamilton area, we have had the driest start to winter since records began in 1900!
- There is a growing body of documented evidence appearing from around the world and Australia showing that human health risks such as cancer, skin and eye irritation, respiratory problems, nervous system damage, blood cell damage, endocrine disruption and reproductive problems are all health risks that can be caused by chemicals from fracking.
- Falling land prices, resulting in decreased saleability of farms. Landholders from the Tara district in QLD have claimed to have as much as a 40-50% decrease in land value since gas mining has commenced.

*As I said, the list goes on. But, can anyone tell me how we are supposed to feel ok about an industry like this, coming in with warning signs all over it, knowing the devastation it has caused around the world? We are fed the usual stories, about how the royalties will flow into the local community, how our gas prices will plummet with this new beaut gas supply, and how local jobs will boom. But what about the agricultural sector jobs that will start to disappear because we can't farm in harmony with an operational Gasfield? The construction phase is usually done by highly skilled fly in fly out workers, who have no commitment to the area. How will gas prices plummet when Australia links into the global gas market where prices are around 300-400% greater than what we pay domestically? And who will all those lovely royalties actually go to? The landholders who are directly impacted? I think not. Neither of our local members, state and federal, know of any study that establishes the economic benefits associated with the gas mining industry in a community. When the negatives are taken into account, including damage to our roads and infrastructure, it is even less clear what the benefits are.*

*In May 2012, the leader of the Victorian National Party, Peter Walsh, announced a new state government policy to double agricultural output over the next 20 years....but, given that one drill pad alone can be as large as 5 ha, and have up to 12 bore holes on it, AND, for a Gasfield to be commercially viable, it needs, hundreds but more often thousands of bores, the question is..... how*

*can this be compatible with the large scale industrialisation of Victoria's prime agricultural land? Agriculture in Victoria contributes \$6.8bill annually to the economy. In QLD, as much as 50% of farms are being taken over by the infrastructure alone that is associated with gas mining. So again, please tell me how the two industries will happily unite?*

*To date, all that the mining companies have managed to achieve is the uniting of a community. If you had asked me 12 months ago if I thought we could pull so many people together for an event, standing united on one issue, I would have thought you were crazy. But now, seeing you all here today, I'm thinking that the only crazy people are any mining industry reps, councillors or politicians who try to tell us that we need this industry and will have it on our farms whether we like it or not.*

*Are we really prepared to risk a sustainable income from a product that all people need – food – and for which there is a growing demand for safe, clean and green food, for a short term (15-20 years) industry known to be damaging to human health and the environment and which produces a product that we in Australia do not need?*

*The survey results speak for themselves; the residents of Byaduk, North Byaduk, Wallacedale and Branxholme do not want gas mining here on our land, on our neighbours land, or on anyone's land. We are, and we will always be, Gasfield free.*