



6 July 2015

Mr Keir Delaney
Secretary
Environment & Planning Committee
Legislative Council Parliament House
Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002
via email: epc@parliament.vic.gov.au

Dear Mr Delaney

Inquiry into Unconventional Gas in Victoria

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Victorian State Government Inquiry into Unconventional Gas in Victoria. Please accept this submission from Bass Coast Shire Council.

Bass Coast Shire Council supports the inquiry and is committed to protecting the valuable and unique natural environment and agricultural assets in the Shire.

Council has been strongly advocating in opposition to coal and coal seam gas mining and exploration in the Shire since 2012. The Bass Coast Shire community has established a clear vision for the future, and mining and exploration are not part of that vision.

At its 19 March 2014 Ordinary Meeting, Bass Coast Shire Council reaffirmed its stance and adopted the following position on coal and unconventional gas mining and exploration:

- 1. Council is totally opposed to exploration and mining of coal, and unconventional gas within the Shire*
- 2. Council will advocate this position through a range of methods including through relevant ministers, opposition leaders, peak bodies, participating in consultation processes and making submissions; and*
- 3. Council will keep the community informed about these activities and opportunities that are available for community participation.*

Bass Coast Shire's prosperity comes from its environment which, in turn, drives its economy through tourism and agriculture. Environmental sustainability and sustainable development is critical to our future.

Council is seeking:

- A full independent peer reviewed research study into the social and environmental impacts of unconventional gas exploration and mining, particularly on ground and surface waters, and the productivity of agricultural land;
- A transparent knowledge-based risk mitigation approach that informs clear and sound policy and decision making;
- A robust and independent regulatory framework be established;
- Consideration of landholder's, and neighbouring landholder's rights; and
- Genuine community consultation to influence the inquiry findings.

Council has particular concerns regarding the effect of unconventional gas exploration and mining activities and resulting production water management on the agricultural lands in the Shire, and the footprint of this activity. With the effects of a changing climate and rainfall patterns the south eastern areas of Victoria are becoming the future "food bowl" of the State. The productive agricultural land must be protected for this purpose. The uncertainty and risks involved with unconventional gas exploration and mining activities cannot be sufficiently mitigated to protect the agricultural land in the Shire.

There is a lack of credible, independent, peer reviewed and authoritative information available that state and local government and the community discuss. An opportunity exists for the State Government to commission a research study into the social and environmental impacts of unconventional gas exploration and mining, particularly on ground and surface waters, and the productivity of agricultural land. This would assist the State Government and the community to have a genuine conversation and build some level of trust.

Council advocates for the rights of landholders to refuse unconventional gas exploration and mining on their land, and rights of neighbouring properties to object. The current process of compensation through VCAT does not empower landholders and brings uncertainty to farmers, discouraging investment in sustainable farming practises.



A social licence does not exist for unconventional gas exploration and mining activity within the Gippsland area, or across Victoria. This was illustrated by the evidence given by the five Gippsland Councils who spoke at the 20 June regional hearing, all advocating on behalf of their communities.

Council questions the longevity of unconventional gas as an affordable domestic fuel source, compared to other fossil fuels and in an increasingly growing renewable energy market. The predicted increase in gas prices, driven by the export market, does not serve the Victorian community well, particularly in rural and regional areas where gas supply infrastructure is not always present and there is decreasing financial incentives to connect. Council would like to see greater support for the renewable energy sector and would like the State Government to focus its investments on the renewable energy sector.

Council also expresses concern regarding the timing of the regional hearings for this inquiry occurring prior to submission closing. The current moratorium on coal seam gas exploration affords the State Government the time to work through a considered sequential process, rather than a simultaneous process to a deadline. Council continues to advocate for its community in opposition to coal and unconventional gas mining and exploration.

For further information on this matter please contact Ms Deirdre Griepsma,
Manager Sustainable Environment on 03 522 2222

Yours sincerely


Cr Kimberley Brown
Mayor

Ref: ED15/88835

