

SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO UNCONVENTIONAL GAS IN VICTORIA

To the Environment & Planning Committee
Parliament House,
Spring Street,
Melbourne VIC 3002

From: Gillian Morpeth



My thanks to the environment and Planning Committee for the opportunity to express my deep concern about the prospect of the exploration, extraction, production and rehabilitation of onshore unconventional gas in Victoria.

Both retirees, my husband Robert and I live on a rural property in the East Gippsland area of Victoria. We share a passion for the beauty and biodiversity of Victoria as a whole and our area in particular. It underpins the tourist industry on which our economy depends. We believe any potential threat to the environment and the fragile ecosystem of the internationally recognized importance of the Gippsland Lakes should be avoided at all cost.

Stopping this industry before it becomes established and causes irreparable damage is an opportunity not to be missed. Based on the experience in other parts of the world where the industry is more advanced, including here in Australia, North America, Europe and the United Kingdom we do not believe that this industry can co-exist safely with other land uses like farming, conservation, and tourism.

After reading enquiry's terms of reference I would like to make a general submission as follows:

We don't need an unconventional gas industry in Victoria to supply energy. Unconventional gas is not a renewable source of energy - it is polluting, contributes to climate change, and is not required as a fuel to transition between fossil fuels and renewables. We can make a planned transition to 100% renewables in Victoria without the need for gas as a 'bridging' fuel, but we need to start investing in real renewables like solar and wind power now.

We don't need an unconventional gas industry in Victoria to provide employment. Supporting and growing our renewables industry will provide more jobs that are future-proofed and lead to greater long-term employment growth in Victoria. Growth in our renewables industry provides a valuable opportunity for re-skilling and redeploying workers who need help to transition from traditional energy production roles – there are now more people employed installing solar panels in Victoria than in coal generation.

Coal seam gas carries massive and proven risks for the environment and health. It threatens our environment, land productivity, agricultural industries, our water supply, our communities and public health, and the risks are far too great to be mitigated or outweighed by any benefits.

There are a number of geological risk factors which may affect future shale gas development in Australia. Induced seismicity from fracture propagation has been identified as a key risk by industry sources 20. To give one example: in the US, the Eola Field, Garvin County in South-Central Oklahoma, more than 50 earthquakes were detected on January 18, 2011, with 43 large enough to locate the epicentres. These earthquakes were associated with an active fracking project being conducted in a nearby well. Studies and investigations have subsequently showed that there was a clear correlation between injection and seismicity.

The implications of climate change also need to be considered. In the case of UCG, which requires access to land in a way that is likely to adversely impact on local farming activity, there is an additional consideration when it comes to climate change. UCG can be seen as one more land use, like urban sprawl, that results in changes to farming activity. There is slow but steady loss of farmland to urban development in key areas around the state. Yet climate science tells us that south eastern Australia will be affected by climate change in a way that will reduce food production. This makes our farmland even more important and in need of protection from continued urban sprawl and invasive activities like coal and gas mining.

Clearly Victorian communities don't want unconventional gas. At least thirty communities have already declared themselves unconventional gas free, and the number continues to grow. Hopefully the inquiry members will bear this in mind, let common sense prevail and respect the wishes of Victorian communities.

From the many negative examples of UCG drilling and/or the process of fracking elsewhere in Australia and around the world and subsequent instances of the imposition of outright bans, we consider the only way forward is to exclude any such activity in Victoria in perpetuity.

Lastly, I implore the Environment and Planning committee to make sure common sense prevails. May I suggest that for the future of Victoria and Victorians a continued moratorium would be a safer option than allowing unconventional gas extraction to proceed?

Thank you for reading and considering my views.

Gillian Morpeth